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Out of the Jaws of Death.





Out of the

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Jaws of Death

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BY

FRANK BARRETT

*Author of "The Admirable Lady Biddy Fane,"  
"Fettered for Life," etc.*



In Three Volumes

VOL. I



CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED

*London, Paris & Melbourne*

1892

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# Out of the Jaws of Death.



## CHAPTER I.

### AT THE "MARINER'S JOY."

I WAS lazing on the rotten balcony before the bay front of the "Mariner's Joy" when I first saw Taras. He came from Ferryboat Alley, the passage running between the "Joy" and Baxter's Wharf, and leading to the steps where the old ferry used to ply, between that part of Shadwell and Rotherhithe, and another man was with him, named Drigo. Taras was a fine, big man, fair, with a long tawny moustache and a short beard. He was dressed like a workman in a dark-grey suit, a flannel shirt, and a blue handkerchief for a tie; but he didn't look like a workman for all that—at any rate, not such as you see down Shadwell



way; he was too clean and active for that. Drigo was not a bit like him, being middle-aged, meagre, with a stoop in his shoulders, and having a yellow face with high cheek bones, a sparse black beard, and slanting eyes; men like him are common enough about Wapping and the Highway.

They walked down to the stairs, and Drigo pointed across towards the Commercial Docks; but I could not make out what he said. Taras nodded, and they turned round and looked attentively at the "Mariner's Joy," and then at Baxter's Wharf on the right and Johnson's Yard at the left—Drigo talking with great earnestness in a low voice all the while, and Taras listening gravely as he smoked his pipe, and replying only with a word or a nod of his head from time to time. I couldn't make out what they found to interest them, for Baxter's Wharf was shut up (and had been shut up for years), and there was nothing in Johnson's Yard but a great heap of rusting boilers and old iron. As for the

"Mariner's Joy," with its broken windows, the gaping planks of its bay front, and the rotten balcony projecting over the muddy foreshore, there was nothing in that to attract attention. They saw me, and Drigo made a joke at my expense, I believe, for he chuckled as he stared at me; but Taras smoked on gravely and never smiled.

At length they quitted the steps and came up Ferryboat Alley, and a minute or two afterwards I heard them open the door in Sweet Apple Lane and enter the sanded bar. I went in through the bar parlour to serve them.

"Give us some gin, miss," said Drigo, speaking with an odd accent.

"We ain't got no gin; we're lost our licence," I answered.

"That's a good sign," said Drigo in a low tone, nudging Taras.

"What do you people drink here?" Taras asked.

"Pongelo, four-half, gen'lly."

They decided to have some "four-half," and while I was drawing it, Taras said—

"Can we have a room here for a few days?"

"'Tain't likely. None of the rooms ain't furnished, 'ceptin' the parlour, and the bloke sleeps in that."

"Where is the bloke?"

"Gorned out."

"When will he be in?"

"Don't know. Preaps five minutes; preaps not afore shettin' up time."

All that I know now has been acquired since that time. Then I spoke like a savage, and was little better than a savage in any way, having lived from my earliest days friendless and utterly neglected.

Taras and Drigo spoke together in a tongue unknown to me, and that gave me an opportunity of looking at them more closely. Taras was about thirty-two then, and, as I have said, a fine large man. There were resolution and



strength in his chin and nose, but great kindness in his mouth and clear deep-blue eyes. I could see, then, that he was to be loved and feared as well. Not so Drigo. There was nothing to love in his face. His deep-sunk black eyes were crafty; his mouth was brutal. His moustache was clipped, and, bristling out, added to the ferocity of the lower part of his face. Two front teeth were missing, and the rest were black; his face was deeply marked by the small-pox. That type of man was not unknown to me.

"I suppose we may wait here till the—the bloke returns?" Taras said.

"You ken if you like."

"Is he your father?" asked Drigo, seating himself on the bench facing the bar.

"No."

"Your husband?"

"No."

"What then?"

"What's that to you?" I replied.

“What is it to any one?” I asked myself, as I made my way through the bar parlour to my former place on the balcony. “What does it matter to anyone who I am or what I am? A homeless dog would find more friends than I; a drowning cat would get more pity. What good am I to any one? What good is life to me?” Such thoughts as these were passing through my mind as I lolled upon the sodden handrail of the platform, looking out at the thick dun water that sluggishly lapped the slimy shore, when, feeling the presence of some one, I turned my head, and perceived Taras standing near with a notebook and a pencil in his hands. He had found his way out there by the passage, and was amusing himself by sketching me, leaning against the wall with his pipe in his mouth. I thought he was “taking me off”—finding something in my face to ridicule, like every one else; and I turned my back on him. Not that I minded whether he made sport of me or not; I was too accustomed to serve as the butt of

coarse jest and heartless sarcasm to heed another shaft, more or less, even from one who seemed less brutal than the rest, but I had no desire to add to the amusement of my natural enemies.

"Do you mind standing as you stood just now?" he asked.

"Garn aw'y," I replied, turning on him spitefully. "Who d'ye think y're a-gettin' at? D'ye think I don't know yer game? D'ye think I'm going to stand for you to make fun of me? I'm as ugly as sin, and not so pleasant—there y'are. I know what I am."

"Ugly!" he said, with an accent of astonishment.

"Yes, ugly. Else why do they call me the kipper?"

"The kipper—that is the fish with a warm, reddish-brown colour—the colour of your hair."

"No, it ain't; they call me 'goldin' surrup' and 'treacle' when they're gettin' at the colour of my hair; and they call me 'kipper' 'cause I'm so skinny and flat. They can call me

anything they likes to lay their tongue to—I don't mind; but I ain't goin' to be drawed and stuck up for all the lot to laugh at—not me!”

Just then I heard the front door open, and going into the bar I met “the bloke”—Putty was his name—who had returned. He was all right—quite sober—for a wonder. I gave him the money I had taken, and nodding at Drigo, said—

“These parties is awaitin' to see you.”

He had not yet noticed Drigo, who sat up in a dark corner, watching him as if to find out what sort of a man they had to deal with. Putty now examined him in the same way, and then turning to Taras, who had entered from the passage, treated him to a long stare.

“We want to know if you can let us have the use of a room for a few nights,” said Taras.

“For a private purpose,” added Drigo, rising; and dropping his voice as he came closer, said, with a wink, “unbeknown to outsiders, you understand.”

Putty nodded, and, addressing me, said, "Hook it," as he took down a pot and drew himself some beer. Taras gave me a pleasant nod as I slunk out by the front door. That altered my destiny.

It was not an uncommon thing for me to be sent out of the way when Putty had business affairs to talk about with his customers across the bar of the "Joy," and I never troubled myself even to wonder what his secret dealings were; but that kindly look in the face of Taras excited a strange feeling of interest in my mind, which made me curious to know what business he had to transact with such a rascal as "the bloke."

I slipped down Ferryboat Alley to the shore, climbed up the rotten timbers on to the balcony, and edged myself into the bar parlour, where I could hear pretty distinctly all that was said in the bar.

Drigo was speaking, but his broken English and the low, crafty tone of his voice made what



he said unintelligible to me. It seemed to perplex Putty also, for presently interrupting him he said with irritation—

“Here! it’s no manner of use your being so cussed sly over this here business. I must know all the particlers straightforard afore I go into it. Here,” he continued, evidently addressing Taras, “I likes your looks better ’an what I do your pardner’s, mate. Lemme hear what you’re got to say.”

“The matter’s simple enough,” replied Taras. “Three friends have left their country for certain reasons. To do so they engaged themselves as sailors on board a vessel bound for London. Their contract binds them to return with the ship to their country, and they cannot openly break the contract without rendering themselves liable to be taken back by force. But they intend to desert, and our object is to provide a place of refuge to which we may convey them by night from their ship as soon as it arrives, and where they may change their

sea-going clothes for the dress we shall have in readiness for them. We chose this inn for that purpose, because it is conveniently near the dock, and is not open to observation. If you do not choose to let us use your house we must find another. That is the whole matter."

"Now I tumble to it right enough," said Putty. "I see you're a gen'leman, sir, and I allers likes to deal with gen'lemen. But you will understand, sir, that all this here is agen the law, and I lay myself open to lose my licence and get a month or two of hard even for letting of parties into the house after closin' hours."

"I will pay you for your risk. How much do you want?"

"It's more risky than what you think. It looks a dead-and-alive hole as no one comes anigh once in a blue moon, but the coppers keep a bloomin' sharp eye on us all the same. When do you expect this here vessel?"

"To-morrow; but it might be delayed till Saturday."

“That means me a-sitting up on the look-out two or three nights. Of course the job would be pulled off when nobody much ain’t about?”

“Between two and three in the morning, if possible.”

“That’d do.” Then, after a little consideration Putty said, “Here, I’ll tell you what I’ll do with you. You shall have the use of my room for a dollar a night while you’re on the look-out, and you shall hand over five quid the night the job is pulled off and your mates get clear. Now I can’t say fairer than that, ken I?”

Taras accepted these terms, and after some further discussion he and Drigo left the “Joy,” saying they would return the following afternoon.

I slipped out of the “Joy” by the way I had entered it and hurried round to the front, impelled I think by some unrecognised hope that Taras would nod to me again. I know that I sank down on the step of Baxter’s Wharf

disconsolate when I saw him in the distance turn the corner of Ferryboat Alley and disappear without looking back.

I had been sitting there in dull apathy, my elbows on my knees and my chin in my palms, a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, when I heard a step in the Alley, and turning my eyes, saw Drigo coming back. Just before he reached the "Mariner's Joy" he stopped, and, facing about, waited a couple of minutes or so, looking up the Alley as if to make sure that he was not followed. Then he dived quickly down the two steps and entered the house. I had taken a dislike to the man from the first. There was an evil, wicked look in his face. There was treachery in his furtive glances, in the very stoop of his shoulders. Why had he come back alone? What further business had he with Putty which he could not have done when Taras was with him? These questions aroused my faculties into unwonted energy. Once more I slipped round to the back of the house

and up by the balcony into the room behind the bar.

Drigo was talking to Putty, but in such a low key that I could make nothing of the sounds that reached me. I caught a glimpse of them through the crack of the door—their two villainous heads close together over the bar—and drew as near as I dared, yet still I could distinguish no words.

“But what are you going to do with him then?” Putty asked; and his voice, though low, was distinct enough—perhaps because I was more used to it.

I could not gather the reply, but, raising his voice to give emphasis to the offer, I heard this clearly—

“He offered you five pounds; I’ll give you double, and you can betray us to the police if we don’t pay up.”

“And a tenner won’t pay me to be a hacces-sory to murder——”

Drigo silenced him with a long “pist;”

and stepping sideways to cast a glance into the parlour, he caught sight of me. He gave the alarm to Putty in a hurried tone of terror, and the next moment a pewter pot flew at my head. I was quick enough to duck and avoid the missile; but I only escaped falling into the savage hands of "the bloke" by flinging myself over the balcony and falling into the mud below.

"Don't let me get nigh you this side of next month, you ——, or I'll pull the weasand out of you," he cried, shaking his fist down at me as I slunk off round a stranded barge.

## CHAPTER II.

### A MYSTERY.

I LODGED in Baxter's Wharf. There was a hole in the side of the wall under the stairs for ventilating the cellars, closed with an iron grating. One of the bars was gone, and through the narrow opening I could just manage to squeeze myself—thanks to being a “kipper.” Once inside I had the whole run of the warehouse. It was quite empty, but upon the top floor some old sacking had been left, and this served me for a bed. It was dry, and good enough for an out-cast like me, who knew nothing of comfort and still less of luxury. I slept there that night, and the next morning I was lucky enough to get work (sail mending) at a ship-chandler's in

Cable Street, for which he gave me my dinner and tea and paid me sevenpence halfpenny into the bargain.

It was dark when I left there between seven and eight, and feeling safe with regard to Putty I hurried down to Ferryboat Stairs as quickly as I could—running part of the way. I was anxious to know what was going on at the “*Mariner’s Joy*.” I had been thinking about it all day long—feeling a strange emotion within me such as I had never felt before, accompanied with a yearning to see Taras again—to get another kind look from him. I resolved if I could to tell him of Drigo’s second visit to the “*Joy*” and all I had overheard, that he might be warned against the treachery which it seemed pretty clear his companion intended.

Putty was lounging against the door-post of the front door of the “*Joy*” in Sweet Apple Lane under the flickering light of the gas lamp at the corner of Ferryboat Alley. He had a



long clay pipe in his mouth, and I judged he was looking out for Taras and Drigo, who had not yet arrived. I waited in the shadow of an archway until he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and turned into the house, yawning and scratching the back of his head ; then I slipped down the Alley to the stairs.

There was no light to be seen at the back of the house ; the passage door was shut, and the rickety shutters of the bay-window were closed also for the first time in my remembrance. Under the stairs I found a dry timber, where I could sit secure from observation, and there I waited for Taras. He was not likely to come for five or six hours, having fixed the hour for the escape of his friends at two ; but I didn't mind that : it was a mild, still night. I had nothing else to do after dark but to think, and I might just as well sit there and dream as anywhere else. I heard Putty put up the shutters about eleven ; and when I went up the Alley an hour later I saw by the glimmer of light

through the dirty fanlight over the side door that he was still sitting up.

A little after the clocks had struck two I caught sight of a boat coming across the river from the Rotherhithe side. As it drew in to the steps I made out one man at the oars and two men in the stern seat. Then my heart beat quicker, for I felt that Taras was there before I heard his voice.

"We shan't want you any more to-night," he said as the boat ran ashore, "but you will be at the same place to-morrow at the same time."

"I'll be there, master, no fear. Good-night, gentlemen."

"Good-night."

The boatman pushed off, while Taras and Drigo groped their way up the dark and slippery steps over my head. I knew the other was Drigo by the sound of his harsh, guttural voice cursing as he stumbled.

As soon as I dared I slipped from my hiding-

place and ran up the stairs like a cat. When I reached the top I saw their figures standing out sharp and black against the light farther up the Alley—Taras square and erect, Drigo with his head buried in his shoulders. They stopped at the side door of the “Joy,” and rapped lightly. The light from within fell upon Taras’s fair beard as the door opened. A few words were interchanged in a low tone, the door closed, and the two men went on, turning the corner under the gas lamp into Sweet Apple Lane. I did not attempt to follow them, dreading to pass the door where Putty might still be standing, but stood there with a feeling like the craving for food in my breast until the impulse to overtake Taras and speak to him, even though Drigo were still with him, overcame my fear; then I ran swiftly up the Alley and along the Lane, straining my eyes with mad desire to see him again.

They were gone; the Lane was empty. When I reached High Street, and stopped there panting for breath, not a soul was to be

seen to the right or left; not a sound broke the dead silence. I gave up the pursuit in despair, and returned slowly in dejection. The light was out in the "Joy" when I passed. I crept into the cellar, felt my way through the store-rooms to my corner in the loft, and lay down to sleep, comforting myself with the reflection that I should certainly see Taras again the next night.

When I looked out in the morning I saw Drigo and Putty on the balcony, giving directions to a carpenter who was patching up the window shutters. When that job was done the man put some screws in the bolt on the passage door, Drigo and Putty looking on all the while. Taras was not with them, nor did I see anything of him all day, though I only left the spot once to buy some food with the money I had earned the day before, creeping under the stairs and behind the barge, and so round by Johnson's Yard into Sweet Apple Lane that I might not be seen from the "Joy." When the carpenter had done his

work they all went in by the passage, bolting the door after, and I saw no more of them.

As soon as it was dark I went to my hiding-place under the stairs ; but I was less patient than I had been the night before, and I could not control my agitation as the time drew near for Taras to come again. My teeth chattered, my body and limbs trembled and shook with feverish excitement, yet I knew not why. As the clock struck two the police boat passed by ; about five minutes later another boat came out of the murky distance, and drew towards the stairs. As it pulled in to the shore I counted five men packed in the stern, and I knew by the number that Taras had found his friends. My heart sank in bitter disappointment, for I had made up my mind to speak to him if he came again alone with Drigo. Now there was no pretext for speaking to him ; he was not in danger. With his three friends he was more than a match for Drigo and Putty, supposing they had evil intentions towards him.

They landed, and having discharged the waterman, groped their way up the dark stairs to the landing above, where they stopped, talking together in a low voice and in their own tongue. Eventually Drigo left them, and went up to the "Joy" to see that the road was clear. Meanwhile, made reckless by my unsatisfied yearnings, I had left my place, and following them noiselessly up the steps, stood now almost within arm's reach of Taras. I distinguished the profile of his face quite clearly against the faint light beyond as he turned to speak a few cheerful words to one of his friends—the bold, handsome outline of his aquiline nose, the curve of his moustache, and his short, pointed beard. Almost I fancied I could see in his face the expression of happiness in having rescued his friends. I was envious of that kindly regard bestowed upon another, and drawing a step nearer, by an instinctive impulse raised my hand and laid it timidly on his arm. The act was not intentional: I could not help doing it.

The movement was seen by his companions, who started with a stifled cry of alarm. Taras, seeing me, spoke a few low words of remonstrance to his friend that seemed to say, "What are you afraid of? It's only a poor, miserable waif;" then, recognising me at a second glance, he exclaimed softly in English—

"Ah, it is you!"

"Yes, me—the kipper," I tried to say, but my voice was thick with feverish agitation.

"You have come to tell us that it is all right," he said, adding, after he had given this explanation to his friends, "it's very good of you;" and he nodded at me again with that kind smile that had wrought such a mysterious effect upon my nature.

Just then Drigo whistled softly from the side door of the "Joy," and Taras hurried his friends forward, leaving me there with more happiness in my heart than I had felt in the whole of my life.

I waited on the landing until they had all

filed into the "Joy;" then I slipped past the closed door and ran across to the archway in Sweet Apple Lane opposite the house. I knew that there was no accommodation for the party in the "Joy," and that as soon as the escaped men had changed their clothes they would come away. As there was no other way but through Sweet Apple Lane they must pass me, and I should see Taras again.

I had stood there not many minutes when I heard a glass crash in the "Joy," and the next moment there was a deep thud as if someone had thrown himself against the door; then there followed a stifled cry, the shuffling of feet, and the sound of heavy blows. These sounds left me in no doubt as to what was going on in the bar of the "Joy." In Shadwell one hears the noise of fighting every night. But I could hardly believe that Drigo and Putty were the attacking party. The latter I knew to be a coward and feeble as well, being sodden with drink; Taras, I felt sure, could defend himself



against half a dozen such men as he ; and timid as his friends might be it was not likely that they would stand aside and make no effort to aid him. I had no fear for him, but rather a savage exultation in the belief that he would thrash his enemies and punish them according to their deserts. It occurred to me that he had discovered Drigo's treachery and was now giving him a lesson not to be forgotten, and with a burning desire to hear him howling for mercy I ran across the road and put my ear to the door.

The fight was over already. I could hear no sound save a faint whispering and occasionally the shuffling of feet, and even these indications of movement within ceased after a while, leading me to believe that the whole party had retired into the room behind the bar. I could not make it out. There was no swearing, no altercation, nothing but silence. It was the strangest way of concluding a fight or a quarrel that I had ever heard. What did it mean ? Had Taras killed Drigo by some terrible blow of that strong

arm, and were they all silenced by the fear of alarming the police? That seemed the most plausible explanation.

I betook myself hurriedly to the dark archway, as I heard a grating of the lock in the side door of the "Joy," and almost immediately afterwards I saw the three escaped friends of Taras come up from Ferryboat Alley. I recognised all three as they passed the archway. They walked in haste. I thought then that they might be in search of a doctor, but they never returned. After a time I ventured down the alley; there was no light to be seen through the fanlight of the side door, and all was silent as the night. I hung about the place in vague perplexity—unable to leave it—expecting every minute some further development of the mystery.

At seven o'clock, when it was broad daylight, the front door of the "Mariner's Joy" opened, and Putty came out and took down the shutters. He had not a scratch on his face. While he was thus engaged Drigo appeared, and he also showed

no sign of having been in the fight. He spoke to Putty, and then walked off along Sweet Apple Lane. Putty went in, and reappeared sweeping away the fragments of broken glass. Then for the first time a terrible fear that Taras had been killed in the fight took hold of me and shook me like an ague. But I did not know what to do. I was like one paralysed—incapable of action. I never thought of going to the police. What use if Taras was dead? Besides, from the earliest days of my recollection I had regarded the police as my natural enemy—the enemy of all outcasts and homeless wretches like me.

But after a time I caught sight of Drigo returning down Sweet Apple Lane with a loaf under his arm and other provisions in his hands. Then, desperate with this new-born fear, I stepped into the road from the doorway where I had been crouching.

“Where is he—the big man with the fair beard?” I asked, stopping him.

"Why," said he in his broken English, and with a grin on his hateful face, but not a sign of embarrassment or surprise, "he went away with his friends hours ago."

"That's a lie," said I; "only three men have come out of the 'Joy' in the night, and those are the three who went into it with you and the man with the fair beard."

"I won't contradict a lady; but if he didn't go away with his friends he is in the house now; and if you are still in doubt *you had better come in and see.*"

The words I have underlined he whispered with such a fiendish grin that there was no mistaking his meaning. If he had said plainly, "Come in and share the same fate as the man with the fair beard," the threat would not have been more obvious.

"Will you come, Beauty?" he added with a sneer.

I made no reply, and he went on to the "Joy" with a derisive chuckle.

It was not the fear of death that made a coward of me ; my life was too wretched and hopeless to be cherished. It was just the dread of personal violence and physical suffering ; that's all. But in the course of the morning I grew apathetic under the sense of weariness and dejection. " If the man with the fair beard is killed," I said to myself, " I may as well be killed too, and be done with it for good and all."

And with this thought I crossed the Lane and pushed open the swing door of the " Joy."

## CHAPTER III.

### A STRANGE VOICE.

THERE was no one in the bar of the "Joy," but I heard the low murmur of voices in the room beyond, so, my courage holding out, I went behind the bar counter, right up to the open door, and looked in. The shutters were still closed, but by the light that came in through the bar windows I saw Drigo and Putty sitting face to face at the dirty table, with pipes in their mouths and a can of drink between them, playing cards. The air was thick with smoke, but it was clear enough that no one, dead or alive, was in the room but those two.

Without looking at me Putty, sorting his cards, asked me what I wanted, embellishing the

question with a few foul words. His calmness astonished me.

"I want to see the fair man," said I suddenly.

"Then you'll have to wait till he comes back."

"He ain't gone out, and you know it. I ain't took my eyes off the door since he came in this morning at half-past two."

"Oh, very well ; if he isn't gone out, you'd better look about here and find him. Two for his bloomin' nob," he added, addressing Drigo as he turned up a card.

On the ground floor there were but those two rooms—the bar and the parlour. To find Taras I must look in the rooms above. My retreat would be cut off if I went upstairs, and if Taras was murdered and lying there, I knew well enough that I should never be allowed to tell the tale. But I took Putty at his word without hesitation, and, prepared for the worst, made my way down the side passage to the

stairs, and after assuring myself that the cupboard under the stairs was empty, save for a little coal piled in one corner, and that the passage itself contained nothing, I went up to the storey above with a faltering step, quaking with the double terror of finding Taras dead and of hearing the stairs behind me creak under the pursuing feet of his murderers. I passed from room to room, laying my hand against the wall for support, my heart ceasing to beat whenever a rotten board cracked under my foot.

The three rooms that composed the flat were absolutely empty; there was nothing above but the cock-loft. To reach that I had to ascend a ladder and creep through the trap door; but I did it, though I expected never to come down again.

The loft was empty and thick with the unstirred dust of years. I descended the ladder, passed again through the rooms, and went downstairs too bewildered by this mystery to reason upon it. The two men were still playing in the



den behind the bar; they had not troubled themselves to follow me.

“Well, ha’ you found him?” Putty called out, hearing my step.

“He ain’t there,” I answered stupidly.

“P’raps he’s made o’ glass, as you didn’t see him along of his friends and can’t see him nowheres about the house?”

“I wouldn’t give him up,” sneered Drigo. “Come and sit down with us till he comes back.”

“Oh, if you’re a going to stay, you ken give the bar a bit of a clean up; there’s all them pots——” Putty broke off short as if he had received some silent admonition from Drigo.

I went behind the counter and began to put it in order, mechanically, for my thoughts were now occupied in solving the mystery of this disappearance. I asked myself if at any time during my watch I had given way to fatigue and dozed. No, I had sat down only for a few minutes, and certainly I had not lost consciousness then. I felt that it was an impossibility for Taras to



have passed me without my perceiving him. Had they thrown his body in the river? No! In the silence of the night I should have heard the door in Ferryboat Alley open a second time, as I had heard it the first; nor could a heavy body have been carried down the Alley without the scuffling of feet being audible. Besides, the risk was one which Putty I knew had not the courage to run. And their composure now was not consistent with their having done a dangerous deed; though Drigo might very well have counselled Putty to assume indifference in order to avert suspicion which might have led me to communicate with the police.

The most reasonable conjecture I could form was that Taras had actually left the "Joy" with his friends, and had turned down to the water instead of accompanying them into Sweet Apple Lane. He might have ordered the waterman to return, and so got away. If this were really the case, he might return as Drigo had intended—not that his word was to be taken in earnest; his whole

tone was ironical and indicative of double meaning. But the hope that Taras still lived and might return put new life into me, and I went about my work behind the bar with such alacrity that I think the men inside conceived I was trying to make amends for my misbehaviour. At any rate, after a long silence, in which they cast furtive glances at me every now and then, their suspicion relaxed, and they entered heartily into a dispute over some trick which one had played with the cards while the other was not watching, and this led to their devoting more attention to their game.

I had a row of washed glasses on the bar, and was standing in front of the parlour door wiping them, when my sense of hearing gradually recognised a sound which did not come from the men at my back. The silence of my occupation allowed me to listen and yet continue working. The sound was very faint; its regularity attracted my attention. One does not notice the single chirp of a sparrow, but if

the chirping is continued persistently for any length of time it never fails to excite attention. It was just the same with this sound, which I noticed after a while occurred in this way, with regular intervals between—

“Tap, tap, tap—tap, tap—tap—tap, tap, tap—tap, tap—tap,” and so on over and over again.

I looked round the bar for an explanation. I saw no vibrating bottle on the shelves such as the sound seemed to indicate; there was no wind to shake the yellow curtain against the front window. It seemed to come from the old disused beer engine before me; and I touched one of the handles to see if it was loose. The rattle it made under my hand was answered almost immediately by a similar rattle, and then the engine itself seemed to be whispering with a human voice.

The glass nearly slipped from my hand; but I recovered my presence of mind in an instant, and went on polishing the glasses, till a new

dispute arose within over a false cut. Then I touched the handle again, and again the rattle was echoed by another; and, as I strained my ears, I heard the whispering sound once more: the engine was articulating words, but so faintly that I caught but the last three, and they were—

“—— for God’s sake!”

My hair seemed to crisp up on my head as I listened. The voice was awful to my ignorant, superstitious mind. I thought the dead was speaking to me. Then on a sudden my reason suggested a natural explanation of the mystery—the voice came through the pipes from the cellar.

I had not before thought of the cellar, for the simple reason that I had forgotten its existence. Five years previously it had been closed, for a motive which I shall presently explain, and since that time no one had entered it. The beer was no longer drawn from the cellar, but from the casks set up behind the bar; and the trap between the entrance and the

bar, through which the casks used to be lowered into the cellar, had been screwed down, and formed part of the floor over which we walked daily.

Now I recollected that the carpenter had been in the "Joy" the day before, and had, doubtless, withdrawn the screws and made the flap practicable for descent. Even now, as I glanced at the floor, I failed to see any difference in its appearance or any sign of the trap having been moved. The sand with which the floor was strewn had been carefully rubbed into the cracks so as to completely conceal the opening. But Taras was down there, I felt sure of that, and, as if to confirm it, the tapping recommenced.

"Tap, tap, tap—tap, tap—tap—tap, tap, tap—tap, tap—tap."

But now the sounds seemed to my excited imagination terribly loud, causing every muscle in my body to contract with the dread of their being heard by Putty or the quicker-witted

Drigo. What signal could I make to let Taras know that I had heard him, and that he was to cease tapping the pipe? It occurred to me that if I could hear his voice through the pipe he could hear mine; but I dared not approach my lips to the engine, and still less answer the whisper, for the machine was in full view of the men in the parlour. The tapping continued—still more audibly it seemed to me. I must stop it, even if I killed every hope I had raised, by replying to his signal with the handle. Going close to the engine, and laying my hand on the handle to pull it down and open the valves, if it would, I said in a loud voice—

“ I’m done, now, bloke, and I’m agoin’. Will you give us something for a bit of grub? I ain’t eat nothin’ to-day.”

He had some coppers on the table that were won from Drigo, and he threw a few on the floor, with some brutal words. I picked them up without reply; but, as I turned

to go, I had the gumption to say in a moody tone—

“I shall kem in after dinner and see if he’s back—that fellow with the beard. He’s took my fancy awful.”

I went out with the fierce determination to keep the spirit of that promise. I *would* see Taras, but by means they little dreamt of, for all their villainous craft.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ESCAPE.

I KNEW more about the “Mariner’s Joy” than was known to Putty. Years before he took the house I earned my living there, doing a drudge’s work and running on errands when I was a mere child. Fly Jigger had it then ; that was before improvements ruined the neighbourhood. The houses in Sweet Apple Lane, now mostly untenanted, were crowded with tenants, and the “Joy” was a favourite “house of call” for all sorts of bad characters who lived there, and for the men employed in Baxter’s Wharf, which was then one of the busiest stores for dry-salting on this side of the river. Fly Jigger did well by legitimate trade, but he made still more

money by dishonest means, and principally by plundering Baxter's Wharf. For this purpose he and his crew had made a passage under the foreshore, opening at one end into the cellar of the "Joy" and at the other into the cellar of the wharf. This passage was called the tub run, because, to prevent the sides falling in, it was lined with casks with their heads removed and set end to end. As soon as the house was closed at night, Fly Jigger and his mates would set to work, going through the tub run into Baxter's Wharf, and returning with goods from the store-rooms. I have seen them bring out as many as fifty hams in a night. The secret was never found out; but when the trade went from Baxter's, and the wharf was cleared out and closed, the run was no longer of any service. The wharf watchman, who had been party to these robberies, took care to close and conceal the cellar opening, and Fly Jigger masked the opening on his side with a flagstone and a barrow load of rubbish, which, trodden

down, presented no difference from the rest of the unpaved floor. Previous to that, to keep the brewers out of the cellar, he had removed the beer barrels, which thenceforth he kept set up behind the bar, saying that it was more fair and square like for the customers to see their beer drawn from the wood than through the engine from the deuce knows where. The closing of Baxter's Wharf was a sad blow to him; but a worse came soon after, for, being of a too active disposition, he took to smuggling tobacco and rum from incoming ships, and, being discovered by the Excise, was sent to prison, and the "Joy" lost its licence. The brewers obtained a fresh licence to sell beer, and put Putty in to manage the house. When he came the spring tides had flooded the cellar, and, seeing that it was of no use, he had the trap screwed down to save the expense of putting new hinges on it. Since then, as I have said, no one had ever gone down into the cellar.

With these recollections crowding my mind, and the means they suggested of delivering Taras filling my heart with a wild delight, I hurried down Ferryboat Alley, and, after looking about carefully to make sure that no one was observing me, I wedged myself through the ventilating hole and dropped into the cellar of Baxter's Wharf. I knew exactly where the opening existed, having taken part myself in some of the old marauding expeditions; and, dropping down upon my hands and knees, I brushed the dirt away from the stone that covered the hole. There was not enough light to see it, but I could trace the outline plainly enough with my fingers.

But how was I to raise the heavy flag? There was no ring or anything to catch hold of, and I knew that if I worked away the rubbish sufficiently to get my hands underneath I should still be unable to lift it. I must have something to prise it up with. A bar of iron would do. It struck me that I

might find what I needed amongst the old iron in Johnson's Yard. If I had thought of that beforehand I might have brought it with me ; but I was too impatient of delay, too eager to begin, to waste time in regrets.

Clambering up to the ventilator, I looked out. Some boys were playing on the shore. I dared not show myself while they were there. It seemed to me that they would never weary of throwing stones into the water ; but at length they gave it up and went away. Then I slipped out, and, pretending to be looking for odds and ends on the shore, made my way up to Johnson's Yard, and got in through a gap in the paling. It didn't take long to find what I wanted : a broken stoking iron looked to me just the thing. Asking myself if there was anything else I should need, it occurred to me that a candle would be necessary, the cellar of the "Joy" being even darker than the wharf cellar. The gates of the yard opened into Sweet Apple Lane, and as they closed im-

perfectly, I was just able to squeeze through—thanks to being a “kipper.”

When I had bought a halfpenny candle and a box of matches out of the money given me by Putty, the trembling of my knees and a feeling of faintness reminded me that I had eaten nothing all day, so I bought a small loaf and some cold fish, and treated myself to a cup of coffee with my last halfpenny. The hot coffee set me up wonderfully, and with revived energy I returned to the yard, and, hiding the bar under my dress, sneaked back to the stairs; then, after another cautious look round, finding the coast clear, I slipped the stoking iron through the ventilator and followed it almost as quickly.

It was a harder job than I expected to move the flagstone and get it out of the way. But I stuck to it, with the perspiration running down my face until, the sensation of sickness seizing me again, I had to give over for a time till I had eaten my loaf and regained strength. At

length, having worked the stone aside, about a foot out of its place, I knelt down to feel if the opening was large enough for me to pass through (for I had not lit my candle to do this work), and then, to my dismay, I discovered that the too-careful watchman had filled the hole up with rubbish. Sinking down on the ground, I could have cried with the mingled feelings of rage and disappointment, but, thinking of Taras, desperation overcame these sentiments, and, springing up on my knees, I tore at the rubbish with my hands vehemently, like a dog in a warren, determined to reach Taras though I had to dig my way to him through the solid earth.

Happily the rubbish was loose and yielded readily to my hands, and still more happily there was not above four or five feet of it, or I might never have got down to the tub run with all my determination. An empty box thrown down had got jammed in the hole about a third of the way down, and below that the space was

empty. Nevertheless, it took me many hours to get the rubbish out, having nothing to dig with but my hands, and nothing but my apron to carry it up in when I got down a certain distance: and then the box, which at first sight seemed to have been sent there by the hand of Providence, appeared after a while to have been wedged in by my worst enemy, for it defied all my efforts to loosen it, until my patience and strength were well-nigh exhausted; and then I had to get it to the top and drag it out, which was even more difficult. Ten o'clock struck before this task was accomplished.

I had been compelled to light the candle to get the box out, and there was now not more than an inch left. I blew out the light and put the end in my pocket. I could feel my way along the tub run, and the light would be needful when I got into the cellar of the "Joy." There were iron staples in the side of the shaft, placed at intervals, to serve as steps. The descent was easy enough, but at the bottom a



fresh obstacle presented itself. I was standing in water! If the tide was up it would be impossible to get through the run, that part of the shore being completely under water at the flood. Dropping on my knees, I crawled forward, entering the first cask. The thick ooze was high over my wrists, but still, if they were all fairly on the same level, the passage was yet sufficiently open. The ooze might simply be the earth that had silted through in the course of years, left in its present condition by a receding tide. But what if it were wet with the rising tide? This question made me pause, despite my impatient desire to go on. If the tide rose before I could get Taras out of the cellar all escape would be impossible, and, hemmed in, we should both be at the mercy of Drigo and Putty. On the other hand, if I waited until the tide had risen and fallen again it might be too late to save Taras.

I backed out of the run, clambered up into the cellar, and, raising myself into the casement

of the ventilator, looked out. The water was certainly high, but whether it was rising or falling I could not tell. As I stood there a clock chimed the half hour past ten. At eleven the "Joy" would be closed; then anything might happen to Taras. One thing was tolerably evident—the two men would go down into the cellar, if only to see if Taras were still alive. But they might have, and probably had, made arrangements with the other man to take him away from the "Joy," in which case, if I waited till the tide had risen and fallen, I should find the cellar empty when I reached it.

This reflection, and a belief that the tide was yet some distance below high water mark, decided me to make the attempt at once, and run the risk of being imprisoned by the tide. "At any rate," I said to myself, "I shall be a prisoner with him."

Without another moment's hesitation I dropped down into the run, put my matches and candle-end in a part of my dress where

they were least likely to get wetted, and then crawled along the run through the slush, which, to my satisfaction, I found nowhere above my elbows. When I reached the further end I rose to my feet, and, finding the irons in the wall, mounted up by them until my head struck the flagstone above; and here, knowing that I should need all my strength, I paused for a minute to get breath; then, bending my head, I rose another step, and, setting my shoulders against the flag, strained every muscle to straighten my body and push up the stone.

For some time it resisted all my efforts, but at length, the matted earth above giving way, it yielded slowly, and I pushed it up sufficiently far to get my head and shoulders through the opening; but, being now stretched to my full length, and finding no iron to set my foot on and get fresh purchase, I could go no farther, and stopped there, unable to go either up or down, the heavy flagstone pressing cruelly upon

my shoulders, scarcely able to breathe, and feeling as if my poor chest bones would be crushed in.

I dared not cry for help, lest my voice should be heard by the men above ; and I could only hang there, gasping for breath and despairing of release. Indeed, I think I must soon have fainted under the dreadful pressure, but that Taras, having listened to these inexplicable sounds in the ground in passive perplexity for some time, hearing the faint moan that escaped me when I felt that it was all over with me, groped forward, and, finding the opening, set his foot under the stone and thrust it right back with one strong effort.

My sense of relief was indescribable. In a moment I had scrambled on to the floor of the cellar. I struck a match, and, raising it, my eager eyes fell upon the great figure and noble face of Taras. He did not recognise me at first, and the look of astonishment in his countenance was curious to see. And no wonder. From

head to foot I was drabbled and daubed with black ooze and dirt ; I could have looked like nothing human rising out of the earth and thus disfigured. But he knew me by the time I had lit the candle. He murmured some unintelligible words of gratitude, and his eyes were suffused with the tears that sprang from his sensitive heart.

“No time for jawin’ about that,” said I, interrupting him. “We’re got to get out of this afore the bloke comes down and the tide comes up.”

He turned round and showed me that his hands were tied behind him. The hemp was black with the dried blood from his wrists. The sight of it filled me with rage against the villains who had used him so barbarously.

“There’s a knife in my waistcoat pocket,” he said.

I found it, and cut the knotted rope ; but it was some time before he could use his numbed hands. At length life returned to them. And

all the time we stood there I knew that the water might be rising in the run to prevent our escape; yet I was unconscious of alarm or fear, or even of impatience. I was with him.

“I am ready now. Are we to go down there?” he asked.

I nodded assent, and led the way by dropping to the bottom of the shaft. I stood aside and he dropped down also. Then I dived into the run, holding the light up to the top that he might see. The ooze was no higher, and we got through just as the candle end gave out; but he had to squeeze to get his broad shoulders through the ends of the casks. I sprang up the hole by the irons, and at the top struck matches while he mounted.

We were safe; but, to guard against pursuit, I dropped the box down and Taras replaced the stone, moving it as if it were no more than a piece of board. Then I led him by the arm to the casement, and, striking another match, showed him the hole by which we were to get

out, telling him he must pull out the remaining bars.

“Dear little friend,” said he, passing his hand round the casement with a laugh. “I doubt if I could get my big head through there.”

This was true, and the unforeseen difficulty dismayed me for a time. All the doors opening on to Sweet Apple Lane and the river were padlocked on the outside. We were prisoners. Suddenly the means of escape came into my mind, and, again taking his arm, I led him up through the empty store-rooms into the one at the very top, where I lodged. The door there was only bolted on the inside. I opened it, still holding his arm, for if in the dark he had taken a step forward it would have been his last.

“What is in there?” he asked, looking into the obscurity as I pushed the door back.

“Nothing is out there ’cept the open air and the river down below.”

“Do you expect me to dive from here?” he asked in a tone of amusement.

“No. Do you think I want you to kill yourself? I ain’t a fool. Wait a bit,” said I, striking my last match.

I held it up when it flamed, and showed him the crane fitted in the doorway, the windlass inside, and the chain hooked against the wall, telling him how I had seen great bales raised from below by this apparatus.

“If you can hold on to the chain I’ll lower you down,” said I. “You can put your feet on them hook things.”

“But how will you get out?” he asked.

“By the hole in the cellar. It ain’t too narrer for me.”

He agreed to this, saying he would wait for me below; and then, as noiselessly as we could, we pushed out the crane, got the chain down, and made arrangements for the descent, his eyes becoming used to the darkness which at first was impenetrable to them. I could see still more clearly, being used to the place and its darkness, and his silhouette stood out distinctly



against the grey sky ; as I held tight on to the winch, I could see him quite plainly when he said " Now, little friend," and swung himself out from the loft door on the chain.

I was more careful than if my own life had depended on the descent, and I turned the handle steadily and yet as quickly as I dared. I felt at ease until his head and shoulders disappeared, but then a horrible dread that he might slip from the chain possessed me as I thought of him swinging out of sight a hundred feet and more above the stone quay below ; and fervent gratitude filled my heart when there ceased to be any pressure on the handle and a low whistle from below reached my ears.

And now, not waiting to wind up the chain or even to close the loft door, I sped down to the cellar that I might rejoin him.

At the foot of the cellar steps my foot struck against something, which, by the sound it made, I knew to be the box I had thrown down the shaft before we went up to the loft.

## CHAPTER V.

### A BITTER REVENGE.

AT the sound I instinctively crouched down as one does in expectation of a blow, and stretching out my hands I felt the rough splintered edge of the box. The significance of its being there was plain enough ; the escape of Taras had been discovered, the men had followed us through the run, and, upheaving the box and stone, had come up into the wharf cellar. Nor was I left a moment in doubt, for as I dropped on my knees Putty cried out—

“ Look out, mate ! We’ve got him. The beggar’s just tumbled over that bloomin’ box.”

Then the guttural voice of Drigo from the further end replied in broken English—

“Knife him ! Dead or alive, I’ll give a hundred pounds for him.”

I strained my eyes in vain to penetrate the darkness. I could see nothing. Not a ray of light entered the cellar by the hole under the stairs. To cross the cellar and escape by the casement was out of the question ; I dared not attempt it. I could not clamber into the opening without some noise which would betray my whereabouts to the villains, and before I could squeeze through the knife would be driven into me. I was not in a condition to reason that I might escape death by declaring at once that I was not Taras. I expected to be murdered for helping him to escape.

I dared not move, for I could not tell whether my enemies were before or behind me—to the left or to the right ; but I held myself in readiness to spring away at the first touch, at a breath, which might warn me of their approach. Those moments of silence as the men waited for some fresh sound to guide them were terrible.

Could that foreigner see in the dark better than I? Was he stealthily drawing upon me to wreak his vengeance? Anything was possible to a foreigner I fancied at that time. Not the death that followed, but the actual horror of having a knife thrust into my body, froze my blood.

Suddenly a flickering, luminous streak appeared in the black distance as Putty tried to strike a match. It was wet; he tried another, producing a second blue streak.

"We must get a light somehows, or we shall get a-stickin' one another," he muttered. "Ain't you got 'ere a dry match, mate? Mine's all wet."

To my increasing terror, Drigo made no reply, supporting my belief that he saw me and was preparing to cut me down; but after a few moments of terrible suspense another streak appeared in the darkness at some distance from the others. Drigo had found a match and was trying it. He was more successful. A green

spark fell and the sulphur began to bubble up into violet flame. It already threw a livid light on his hideous face and a gleam on the knife in his hand; in another moment I should be seen.

How could I escape? The casement was beyond them. The steps were behind me, but I dared not turn my back on that knife. The box in front of me suggested a better means, and as Drigo raised the burning match, making the way clear, I shot across the intervening space, and dropped down the shaft into the run. The light was so dim and my movement so rapid that I was not recognised by the men; they saw only a figure dash past and drop down the hole; and under the impression that it was Taras, as I knew by their cries, they gave chase in an instant, one—Drigo I believe—dropping down before I had passed through the second tub. But I was out of arm's reach and made good use of my start.

The water had risen considerably. It was

up to my throat in one part. My sodden petticoat clung to my legs and weighed me down as I rose to my feet; nevertheless I scrambled up into the cellar of the "Joy" while the men below were groping for the foot irons, swearing furiously. A lamp stood on the ground where they had left it beside the flagstone which Taras had thrust aside with his foot. One edge of the stone lay square with the side of the hole. Seized by a savage impulse, I caught hold of the stone by the further edge and raised it into a perpendicular position; then, as Drigo's head appeared, with vindictive devilry in his upraised face, I pushed and let it fall. It struck his head, and he fell with a howl on his comrade below.

It was easy enough to escape now. A glimmering light in the bar showed me that the flap was open; against the wall rested the steps by which they had descended. But the blow I had dealt Drigo filled me with a fiendish joy and whetted my thirst for vengeance. All the evil passions of my nature were animated with a

craving for retaliation as I thought of the evil those men would have done to Taras and me. The only wish of my heart was to inflict some terrible punishment upon them. I dragged up the stone and poised it, in the hope that Putty might come up and that I might serve him as I had served Drigo. But he was wise enough to profit by the experience of the other, and preferred to stay below and vent his fury in curses.

While I was waiting the stone slipped, and in moving to keep it in position my foot struck the lamp and overturned it. It was a large benzine lamp, and as the liquid ran out it took fire, sending up licking tongues of flame. The pool spread and the blazing spirit running over the edge of the shaft ran down in a fiery stream and dropped in goutts of flame. The men below shrieked aloud in terror.

“Get out of my way,” shouted Putty; “we shall be burnt alive if we stay here. We must get back through the hole.”

I heard them cursing each other as they

struggled together, each trying to get first into the run. Then when the struggle ceased, Drigo, gasping for breath, cried—

“We can’t go back; the water’s up to the top.”

The pool of fire kept spreading. I could hold the stone no longer. It fell with a thud, cutting off the sound of mingled execrations from below. I ran up the steps into the bar, and having drawn them up after me, so that if the men got out of the shaft they could not escape from the cellar, I let down the flap. The place was thick with suffocating smoke. Scarcely able to breathe, I groped my way down the passage, drew the bolts of the door, and got out on to the balcony.

Taras was waiting for me at the end of the stairs; his figure was just discernible by the faint light that came from the gas up Ferryboat Alley. In a couple of minutes I was by his side, panting for breath.

“I’ve kep’ you a-waitin’,” I gasped.



"Not long," said he.

Indeed, all that I have narrated in this chapter may have taken place in less than twenty minutes.

"Have you been running?"

"Yes, one way and another I've had a pretty good run for it."

"What's the matter, little friend? Your teeth are chattering. Why, your shoulders are wet."

"Never mind; you're all right. There ain't no danger now. I've done for 'em."

"Done for them," he replied in a low tone of perplexity. "Whom?"

"Why, the foreigner and Putty. I've done for 'em both," said I, expecting him to share my feeling of exultation.

"What do you mean?" he asked in a tone of sharp severity.

He had never before spoken to me like that. His harshness frightened me and changed my feeling of triumph to one of mortification.

If I had done wrong it was for his sake, not my own. I hung my head and made no reply.

“What do you mean?” he repeated with increased sternness, turning me almost roughly by the shoulder that the light might fall on my face—“speak.”

“What do you think I mean?” I asked morosely; “we’ve bested ’em, ain’t we? I’ve got you right away from ’em, ain’t I? Isn’t it me what’s done ’em for you?”

He drew a deep breath of relief, and then, in a tone of wonderful tenderness, said—

“Forgive me, little friend; I thought you meant something very different from that. I do not understand English well. But how did you get so wet?”

“I couldn’t drop out of the hole into the water down there without getting wet, could I?” said I, still with an air of resentment, though I had forgiven him in my heart the moment he spoke again with kindness.

"Come, you need dry clothes—rest; I will take you to your friends."

"I ain't got no friends. You leave me here. I'm all right. Go quick past the house."

"Not without you. If you have no friends I will take you to mine."

I stopped—he had drawn me onward as he spoke—and shook my head. The rank smell of burning seemed to fill the air. He might see the flames bursting up in the bar of the "Joy" and learn what I had done. I would rather separate now than risk meeting his angry reproach.

"Don't be afraid," said he, mistaking the cause of my reluctance to pass the "Joy;" "no one shall hurt you nor me either now my hands are free—come."

His strong hand was on my arm. I could not resist his command. But as if I were in terror of Putty I ran that we might pass the "Joy" quickly, giving him no time to find out

that I had set the place on fire over the heads of his enemies.

“Stay,” said he, checking me when we were some distance down Sweet Apple Lane; “you have run far enough. There is no danger now and we have still a good way to walk. There are no cabs in this part of London.”

We walked on towards the Minories. The streets were quite empty. We passed only one policeman, and he said nothing, seeing Taras with me. He eyed us curiously though, thinking, perhaps, that Taras had saved me from drowning, his clothes also being wet and caked with black mud. We walked in silence for some time, but Taras spoke at length in a low, soft voice—

“I owe my life to you, little friend; more than my life,” he added—“my liberty.”

“How did you let ’em come over you?” I asked.

“I was deceived. I thought the dark man

was a friend; he was an enemy—an agent of police.”

“And the three others—was they slops too?”

“Slops—what is that?”

“Policemans.”

“Yes, they were police.”

“Was they going to kill you?”

“No, worse than that. They were going to take me back to my country.”

“You ain’t done anything wrong, are you?”

“Not wrong as we understand the word—you and I.”

“I thought it was only parties like me as was hunted about for being ’spicious carriers.”

“No class is free from suspicion in my country; it is not like yours.”

“It must be pretty bad if it’s wus.”

“It *is* pretty bad.”

“What are you goin’ to do with the dark man with the round shoulders?”

“Keep him at arm’s length.”

“But ‘sposin’,” I persisted tentatively—  
“‘sposin’ you’d got him in a corner or in a ‘ole, wouldn’t you drop something on him and smash him?”

“That would be murder.”

“Garn aw’y! It ain’t murder; it’s justice. You only does for him jest what he’d do for you if he got a chance.”

“That is the law of brutes, not of men. It would be murder, and we should pray for strength to resist the lust of vengeance that leads to it. For think, little friend, of the misery that follows—the degradation and shame of being shunned by innocent women and good men—the feeling that one is not fit to kiss a child.”

He said more, but I could not follow him for thinking of the men I had left to die in the “Mariner’s Joy,” whom I had murdered for this—to be shunned for ever by Taras. A sickness overcame me; I must have stumbled

or reeled, for Taras stopped suddenly and held me up.

"You are faint. Let us sit down on this step," he said.

"No. We will go on. I shan't be silly again."

He drew my arm through his, and bade me lean on him, telling me we had now but a little way to go. Leaning on his arm I wished that we might go on for ever and ever and never reach our journey's end. "Talk to me," I said.

He proposed to open a brighter subject; but I would not hear of that, and asked him to tell me more about the dark man and the police.

"He is nothing but an instrument," said Taras. "I bear him no ill-will. He does what he is paid to do, like a soldier who lowers his rifle and kills another soldier at the command of his officer. It isn't the unreasoning man who executes an unjust law, but the thinking man who makes the law, who should die." And then he went on to speak of many things beyond the

reach of my reason, but that made no difference to me. I heard his voice like a flowing strain of music that softened my heart and lighted up my soul with an exquisite emotion such as I had never before felt. And I knew not why. It seems strange, anomalous, unaccountable to me, as I look back now, that these feelings should suddenly spring up in my being, which had hitherto been dull to all the influences of nature. But surely it was not more exceptional than the revelation of a new world to the blind whose eyes, after years of darkness, are opened.

We stopped before a small house in a by-street near the Minories, and Taras rang a bell. The door was opened instantly by a fair-haired young woman and her husband. They were friends who expected the arrival of Taras with the three men whom he had been led to believe were friends. They looked at me in mute astonishment when we entered the shop—a tobacconist's—as Taras, in his own tongue, briefly explained what had occurred. But



when he had spoken, the man took my hands in his, and, pressing them, told me in his broken English that I should never want a friend while he and his wife lived. She could speak no English except "yes" and "no," but she understood what her husband said, I think, for she nodded a smiling agreement with his promise and kissed me heartily upon both cheeks, despite the dirt upon them.

Then she led me quickly to a room upstairs, where a bright fire was burning, and chatting merrily all the while, sometimes to me, sometimes to her husband, who followed, bringing a big bath and a can of hot water; she laid out a complete change of clothes for me, and when they had made me understand that supper was waiting for me below they left me with more cheerful smiles and expressions of kindness.

To all their amiable overtures I made no response—not once opening my lips to thank them. Their sympathy and solicitude bewildered me, being as strange and incomprehensible to me

as the language they spoke. I had never had to thank anybody in all my life for anything, and the sentiment of gratitude was as unknown to me as the experience of gentle treatment. Indeed, I seemed to have stepped suddenly into another world, where all was unreal and dreamlike.

As dreamlike was the physical sensation produced by the warmth of the bath and the comfort of clean dry clothing. A delicious languor steeped my senses in forgetfulness of misery, and yielding to the impulse of the moment I threw myself upon the soft bed, and the next minute lost consciousness of everything.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LAST RESOURCE.

I AWOKE with a feeling of overpowering heat and suffocation. The bedclothes had been drawn over my shoulders, and my head sinking from the pillow had buried my face beneath them. But before this unusual condition was discovered, another explanation presented itself to my half-awakened imagination: I was at the bottom of a burning pit. Drigo and Putty were there, struggling with each other, and trampling me beneath them in their frantic efforts to escape, and Taras was looking down at me with that stern severity which I had seen but once in his face. He would not stretch out his hand to save me, but, with the same unbending ex-

pression, turned his head and slowly walked away.

I started up, looking about me wildly. The fire had burnt down ; only a few embers glowed in the grate. The lamp was turned down ; its light fell upon some food spread upon the table.

Then I realised my position.

My face and hands were wet and clammy with heat and terror ; that terrible, warning dream haunted me. What should I do ? The thought of lying down again to sleep was repugnant to me with the dread of dreaming once more. It must be nearly morning for the fire to have burnt so low. In a little while that fair-haired woman and her husband would come with friendly greetings. He would press my hands, and she kiss my cheeks again. I was not unconscious of the kindness and generosity that animated them, and yet the prospect of meeting them was—I knew not why—as repugnant to me as the idea of sleeping again in their bed.

Walking across the room my eye fell upon

some children's toys and a doll upon a shelf: they perplexed me with a new and unaccountable fear. Turning to the mantelpiece I saw a photograph in a frame hanging on the wall. It was a child, the owner of the doll and playthings on the shelf; perhaps the fair-haired woman's child. At that supposition the cause of my repugnant fear was revealed to me, and, remembering the words of Taras, I said to myself, "This is the honest woman and good man who would shrink from me: this is the child whose lips I may not kiss."

What then? I asked. Let them shun me. Who wants their kindness or friendships? Not I. The world is good enough without them when Taras smiles. But how long will he smile? By this time the firemen have found the charred bodies, and every one is talking of the tragedy at the "Mariner's Joy." Soon enough, in a few hours, the news will reach Taras, and he will know what I have done—know that I am a murderess; then he, too, like the Taras in

my prophetic vision, will turn his back on me without one gleam of pity, and go away. Should I stay and suffer that? My spirit rose in wild protest. That dream should not be realised : that pitiless look should not for ever haunt my life.

With these thoughts running through my fevered imagination, I hunted about the room for the sodden rags I had taken off. They were gone ; the woman had removed them with the determination that I should not wear them again. Well, I would take those she had given me to wear. It mattered little whether they were a gift or not. It would not add greatly to their loathing to know that the murderess was a thief as well. I put on the shoes she had left, and took a woollen shawl as well to wrap about my head ; then opening the door cautiously, that no noise might awaken the sleeping household, I found my way downstairs by the glimmer of light that came from below.

The shop was before me, but on the right of

the stairs was a half-open door. The light was in that room, and glancing in I saw Taras stretched on a couch asleep. I could go no further; the thought that I should look upon his face no more seemed to take away all power from my mind and body, and I stood there dazed with that sense of utter bereavement, until, impelled by wild desire, I passed into the room and drew quite close to him.

I sank upon my knees and put my face so close to his that I felt his breath upon my cheek; but I could not see him for the tears that blinded me. My fingers hung quivering over him, for I yearned to touch him, yet dared not. My tears ran down my cheeks and fell upon the floor; then I could see him. The same sweet kindness was on his face that had woke my soul from its lethargy.

“That is what I will remember all my life,” I said to myself as I rose. His watch lay on the table, and beside it a ring I had noticed on his finger when I was cutting the cord that bound

his hands. I took it, feeling that he would not begrudge me this for a keepsake.

There was fog in the street ; but the coppery background to the line of house-tops, and the quick heavy tread of men going to work, showed that it was morning. I had no knowledge of the neighbourhood, but that did not trouble me. My only object was to get away from Taras, and hide myself where he could never come to kill my happy memories with a reproachful look. After a while I knew by the long lines of carts and barrows, the voices of porters and costers, and the smell of fish, that I must be near Billingsgate Market, and soon after I saw the Monument looming in the yellow fog. I crossed the bridge, and went down the steps into Tooley Street, not with any definite object, but because the thick darkness down there seemed to offer oblivion. Finding myself alone at the foot of the steps, I tore off a piece of trimming from my dress, and passing it through Taras's ring I tied it round my neck, hiding the ring in my bosom.



I have but the faintest recollection of what happened during the day, my mind being too seared by previous events to be sensitive to slight impressions. I remember feeling wretched and hungry, and sick with the fatigue of walking. I wandered on because I found no place to rest until hazard led me into Greenwich Park about dusk. There I fell asleep on a bench.

It was raining when I awoke ; but it was too dark to distinguish even the trees, and I could not sleep again for shivering with cold and the aching of my body. So I sat there in dull resignation, watching the daylight come and marking one by one the heavy drops as they plashed on the bench beside me, falling from the boughs above ; until, goaded by hunger, I threw off my lethargy and went down into the town.

It was still early, but the coffee-shops were open, their windows clouded by the warmth within. The first one I entered was full of customers, and the man serving them was so busy

that he scarcely glanced at me in replying to my humble appeal for food.

“Oh, I ain’t got the time to attend to beggars—out you go!” said he, bustling along with his hands full of empty cups.

The next one was less crowded, and a woman was in the kitchen before the flaming fire. She turned round, setting her hands on her hips, and looked me down from head to foot as I asked her to give me something to eat and drink.

“I ain’t got no money; but I’ll do a job of work for it,” I said.

Had I worn my old rags she would certainly have given me something, for these people are never wanting in charity of that kind; but the dress I wore excited her mistrust.

“Ain’t got no money,” said she, “and you dressed like that with a gownd good enough for me. Why, what have you done?” and as I made no reply, she continued, “You’re run away from service and done something wrong; don’t tell me. You’ve got it in your face; you

wouldn't look so wild if you hadn't done a mischief. No, my gal, I don't employ young women of your sort—high-heeled boots and all—and you can just take 'no' for an answer and go."

The fog which sheltered me from observation the day before had given place to a driving rain; and now, as I plodded on through the streets, every one noticed me. Two factory girls, with the fringe and gaudy ostrich feathers of their class, stopped, gaping right before me.

"My Gawd, look at here, Liz!" said one; and then as I passed she broke forth into a shriek of laughter and derision.

The spectacle was grotesque enough to excite coarse wit—a girl, with melancholy madness in her face, dragging slowly along the street in the drenching rain, and respectably dressed. That did not occur to me then. I was too dejected to heed ridicule, or to ask myself what there was in my misery that seemed ludicrous.

When I grew dizzy and felt too weak to walk, I turned down a by-street, hoping to find

another bench where I might rest a little. But I had walked away from the park, and the by-street only led me into a desolate waste, broken by a few squalid houses in scattered blocks, a gas works, and here and there in the dim horizon a factory shaft. Not a bank to sit on—not even a railing to rest against—nothing but a level stretch of mud and refuse thinly patched with tufts of grimy nettles and withering grass, an ochre sky above and a distance grey with the slanting rain.

I plodded on doggedly—why should I go back?—with my head down, like a jaded beast—sometimes closing my eyes to shut out the surroundings which seemed to add to the sick loathing within me, stumbling in rough places, careless whether I fell or not—benumbed—dazed—more asleep than awake.

The howl of a tug aroused me, and, lifting my head drowsily, I found that I was by the side of the river, separated from it only by a narrow causeway and a strip of oozy shingle.


The factories on the other side were half hidden in their own smoke, beaten down by the rain. The line of shore upon this side was unbroken save by a hulk that stood aground at some distance. I saw the tug slide away into the murky cloud that hung over the river, and watched the swell it made flow up the shingle and recede, flowing again, and falling in diminishing waves until the last ripple faded away, leaving the stream as still as a pond under the steady rain.

It was time to go on again now that there was nothing more to notice. Which way should I go, I asked myself, and then, where should I go, and why? Neither shelter nor food was to be got by walking, nothing but aching pain in body and soul. Better to stop here and rest. A wisp of straw came into sight, floating down with the stream so easily that I envied its condition. To lie upon the water and knowing nothing, feeling nothing, to pass away in endless sleep, surely that must be good. It would not

be colder to lie in the river than to stand shivering in the rain ; nothing could be worse than living.

I walked down the shingle and stood in the water. It seemed warm to my feet ; I walked out still farther, and my limbs ceased to shake under me. What a fool I had been to endure such misery with this alternative at hand ! I went out more swiftly, till the water lifted me from my feet, and I felt myself going on and on without exertion. I put my hands up to my breast to see if the ring was there, and clasped them upon it to keep it safe.

Then out of the darkness that closed over me the grave, kind face of Taras came into sight, and out of the rushing sound in my ears his voice spoke, I know not what, but with the tones I had heard before of soothing music. Everything was fading away like ideas at the approach of sleep, but at the very last the kind eyes smiled as if Taras in those dying sounds were saying, " Farewell, little friend."



## CHAPTER VII.

### A NEW LIFE.

TARAS read in the summary of a morning newspaper—

“An extraordinary case of attempted suicide came before ‘the poor man’s friend’ yesterday and is reported in our columns. The prisoner, a respectably dressed young woman, not uninteresting in appearance seemingly, was seen to walk deliberately into the river off Greenwich marshes, and was rescued only just in time for life to be restored. She has persistently refused to open her lips in reply to questions, and the only clue by which she may possibly be identified is a mysterious ring which was found worn on a piece of ribbon about her neck. It is a man’s

ring made of wrought iron with the device, in Russian characters running round it, ‘My life is thine.’”

He found the report under the head of “Police Intelligence.”

“THAMES POLICE COURT.—A young woman, whose name, age, etc., were marked ‘unknown’ on the charge sheet, was brought up for having attempted to commit suicide. Inspector Lewson explained that he had been unable to fill in the charge sheet, as prisoner had obstinately refused to answer questions, and indeed had not spoken one word since she had been in custody. He could not say whether her silence was the result of perversity or inability to speak or to understand. The only indication of her nationality was a man’s ring made of wrought iron, which had been found on a strip of braid tied round her neck, and which had an inscription running round it in foreign characters which he believed were Greek. On the ring being handed up to the magistrate he said the device was in



Russian and meant 'My life is thine.' Addressing prisoner in this language the magistrate put several questions without effect, prisoner maintaining perfect silence, though showing the utmost anxiety to recover the ring, and seizing it with savage delight when the magistrate had it passed over to her.

"Inspector Lewson said that the prisoner was seen from the *Warspite* police hulk stationed off Greenwich marshes to walk deliberately into the river. A rescue crew was sent off at once, but prisoner was unconscious when picked up. He had been unable to gather any particulars respecting her, except that she had been seen in High Street, Greenwich, early that morning, with no covering but a light wrap, and completely drenched with exposure to the heavy rain.

"The magistrate again addressed the prisoner with his customary kindness and sympathy, but failing to obtain the slightest response remanded her, at the same time expressing a

hope that the reporters would give publicity to the case, in order that prisoner's friends—if she had any—might come to her assistance.

“The following is a description of the young woman:—Height, 5 ft. 5 in. Probable age, 21. Hair, dark chestnut; eyebrows and lashes of a deeper shade. Eyes, dark brown. Features, long, irregular, delicate, but pinched and hardened by privation. Fingers, long. Dressed in grey stuff dress, plain but well made, but obviously too large for her slight figure. High-heeled button boots, also too large. Ears, unpierced, and no ornament whatever except the above-mentioned ring.”

Taras came to me—with what despatch I can imagine, knowing his unhalting swiftness to relieve distress. I was brooding in the police cell, seated on my bed with my<sup>4</sup> chin resting in my hands, when I heard the grating in the door moved. I had been visited already, questioned, and lectured enough, and I sat there, motionless under this last inspection in sullen

determination to let nothing move me. But at the words, "That is she," I started to my feet, in an instant recognising the voice of Taras, and waited while the door was being opened for him to enter with such trembling fear as I had not felt before the magistrate who might send me to a prison or a madhouse. Did he, too, regard it as a crime to try to end one's misery? Had he come to reproach me with my sins? I hung my head, fearing to read my condemnation in his face.

"My little friend," he said.

The true ring of sympathy in his voice, the look of tender compassion I found in his eyes as I lifted mine, told me that he forgave me, and with an involuntary cry of joy I caught the two hands that he held out to me.

He spoke to the warder, who after a little hesitation withdrew, leaving us alone.

Then I whispered to Taras—

"You've heered all about it?"

"As much as I want to know," he replied.

“And you don’t mind?”

“I mind so much as this—that if I can make life endurable to you I will.”

“I won’t do it again if you tell me not to. I’ll bear anythink—I’ve made my mind up to it. Will you come and see me again?”

“See you again? Why, you don’t think I mean to leave you here?”

“I didn’t know. Do you think you can get me off?”

“There’s very little difficulty about that.”

“He’s lef’ the door ajar; and if I oncet gets in the street——” I stopped, for a smile on his face told me that he did not intend to get me off in this way.

“There’s no need to run the gauntlet,” said he. “The magistrate is a good and reasonable man. I will tell him all I know about you;” then he stopped, seeing my dismay at this proposal.

“Don’t you want me to tell him?” he asked.

“ I don’t mind—not much. Do what you like ; I won’t complain. Only he won’t let me off—he can’t. P’r’aps as you’re a foreigner you don’t know that in this country what I’ve done is a hangin’ job.”

“ What ! ” he exclaimed with another smile ;  
“ hang a girl for trying to kill herself ? ”

I saw that we were playing at cross purposes, and after a minute’s silence I said—

“ I thought you knew all, but you don’t. I thought it ’ud a been in all the newspapers and every one a-talking about it. I was a-goin’ to tell you at first, but I turned it off when I see you look at me so terrible. But I’ll tell you now, ’cause I can’t bear to think I ain’t actin’ square with you—you’re so kind-like to me. Only you won’t be too angry with me, will you ? And you’ll come and see me again one of these days ’fore it’s all up wi’ me, hey ? ”

“ Tell me what you mean, little friend, for Heaven’s sake ! ” he said earnestly.

“ I done for ’em, not like I made out, but

real done for 'em. I smashed the foreigner with a stone, and shet 'em both down in the hole and set the cellar all a-fire—true as He'veing I did." And then I narrated in detail what took place after I had let him down by the chain and before I rejoined him on the stairs.

He listened in mute amazement with set features, but with such gentleness melting in his eyes that, having finished my story, I found courage to touch his arm and say, "You ain't a-going to shrink from me for doin' what I didn't know you wouldn't like, are you?"

"God forbid!" he said, pressing my hand. "If you did this thing I am responsible—not you; and if punishment is to follow I will take my full share."

Holding my hand as if to assure me of the bond of fellowship, he stood for some moments silent in thought. Then after putting a few rapid questions to me, his face brightened, and he said—

"I am hopeful, little friend. That Mon-

golian head is too hard to be smashed by the slight fall of a flag-stone ; the lamp upset on the earthen floor of a brick cellar would not hold sufficient benzine to set fire to the floor above. If the house had been burnt down, the bodies of those two rascals would have been unearthed, and the tragedy could not have escaped the notice of my friends in the Minories. I will go and find out the truth. If the men are killed, I will come back and give myself up to the police for my share in the murder ; if they are not, you shall leave this cell before noon. In any case I will see you again quite soon."

The cab that brought him stood outside the station. He sprang in, telling the driver to go to Sweet Apple Lane. As he neared Ferryboat Stairs his first hope was realised : the " Mariner's Joy " still stood. The shutters were down. He stopped the cab, and a minute after stood on the spot where he had been thrown down and overpowered a few nights before. There his second hope was partly gratified : Putty stood

behind the bar with one arm in a sling, a patch over his eye, and otherwise looking rather the worse for recent events, but still alive. At the sight of Taras standing there before him with that strong resolute face and formidable proportions his jaw fell.

“ You ain’t a-going to round on us, master, are you ? ” he asked in a tone of abject remonstrance. “ It wasn’t no fault of mine. I didn’t know what they was after ; and, look here, I’ve had a pretty good doin’ for it one way and another—what of getting my eye pretty well knocked out, and my arm anigh broke, as you may say, along of that feller a-falling all the way down that hole a-top of me—to say nothing of getting burnt here and here, and all down there, and a suit o’ clothes torn off my body, with internal injuries as causes me that ill convenience I can’t sleep a wink all night. And got nothing for it, neither. Why, I’m bless’d if I don’t wish I hadn’t never seen the lyin’, ugly hound with his hump back.”



“Where is he now?” asked Taras, sternly.

“Well, that’s more ’an I can tell you, master, and I’d round on him if I could—that’s as true as Gawd, for he ain’t paid me a farthing for all the damage done, to say nothing of what he promised, which comes of trustin’ spies and being a fool not to stand by you as are a real gentleman, and won’t be too hard on a poor fellow, I know. However, it’s a comfort to know as he’s got his jimmy cracked by that ’ere flagstone a-wollopin’ down on him, and serve him right, and won’t be able to show his ugly face outside a house for weeks to come through gettin’ burnt along of the lighted ile ten times wus ’an me; and I give him a tidy dressing down too, though if you only knew what I suffered down that hole, and wellnigh drowned, too—the pair of us—and then as near suffocated with the smoke as it don’t matter what afore ever we managed to get up out of the cellar——”

Taras waited to hear no more, but turned his back and left the “*Mariner’s Joy*” without a

word—doubtless not less to the astonishment than to the satisfaction of the apprehensive Putty.

From Ferryboat Stairs Taras hurried back to the Thames Police Court. It was still early; the magistrate was hearing applications in his private room. Taras sent in his card with a few words written below, and obtained an immediate interview, in which, with characteristic candour and directness, he briefly told what he knew of my history, leaving the magistrate to form his own conclusions as to the cause of my attempt to destroy myself, and offered to give sureties for my better behaviour in the future. But before he had arrived at this point the magistrate wrote an order and despatched it to the station. The officer who brought it took me back to the court. Taras was standing at the door, and I saw by the light in his face that he had good news for me.

“The men are living,” he said as I passed him.

The magistrate had just taken his seat when I was led into the dock. He refrained from putting any questions, but spoke to me at some length in a tone of severity. The tone was all I heard, for my thoughts were wholly occupied with conjectures as to the course Taras would take in the future. It mattered very little to me whether I went to prison or returned to such an existence as I had hitherto led in Shadwell; the more important question was whether Taras would come sometimes to give me a kind look, or whether, having done so much, he would feel himself released from any further concern for my welfare, and so leave me to my fate. These speculations were broken off by the warder.

“Come on down,” said he, touching my arm. “Don’t you hear, you’re discharged?”

I left the dock, and another “remand” took my place. Taras beckoned me, and taking me out of the court, put me in the cab waiting there. I did not catch the address he gave to the driver,

but to my great joy he stepped up and seated himself beside me.

“Are ye goin’ to take me back to Shadwell?” I asked.

“No,” said he ; “we must find a better world than that.”

“The Minories?” I asked, with a recollection of the fair-haired woman.

He shook his head and said—

“You must forget all that is passed, for you have to begin a new life, little friend.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TARAS.

THE cab stopped on the Albert Embankment, nearly opposite Lambeth Bridge. Taras stepped out and gave me his hand as if I were a lady. The dingy old house before us had been a shop ; Taras took it for the view it commanded of the river, and turned it into a dwelling-house. What had been the shop front was draped with French muslin curtains within, drawn back behind a shelf, on which stood some pots of bright flowers.

While Taras was paying the cabman one of the curtains was pulled aside, a face appeared for a moment, and the next minute the door opened and Mère Lucas stood there, looking, to my eyes,

as strange as the window from which she had first peeped out. She was so stout that she quite filled up the doorway, and her proportions were the more noticeable for a big apron of dazzling whiteness worn over her blue cotton dress. On her head was an equally dazzling cap of a kind I had never seen before, elaborately goffered, with the strings carefully tied in a fine broad bow under her double chin. There was a pretty wave of silvery hair growing low on her forehead, and then came her great broad face with its expression of healthy cheerfulness, not less remarkable to the eyes of an East Ender than the spick and span neatness and cleanliness of her dress.

Her fine dark eyes looked as if they might flash at times with passionate anger, but the lines about them were pleasant traces left by mirth ; and her long upper lip and broad mouth seemed made for laughter and good cheer. Her habitual geniality, however, was less obvious just then, for she scanned me with a distinctly

unfavourable eye, and her pursed lips showed that she disapproved of her master bringing home such a visitor. Had I been well-dressed, or only tolerably good-looking, it would have been another thing. But she respected and loved Taras too well to let him read her dissatisfaction, and drawing back into the passage as he led me in she received us with a profound bow and opened the door of the adjoining room.

“This is my housekeeper, *Mère Lucas*,” said Taras to me as he entered, and turning to her he spoke a few words in French which caused her to gasp an exclamation of astonishment as she clasped her hands together. Then, after regarding me for a moment in silence and round-eyed wonder, she addressed me in her unintelligible language; but I understood the tone of apology and self-reproach, and the tremulous emotion in her full lips, and the affectionate warmth in her soft eyes, fully atoned for any hostility she might at first have shown. Finally,

as if by an ungovernable impulse, she seized me by the shoulders and planted a couple of sounding kisses on my cheeks, saying, as she gave me one last embrace before leaving the room, “*Pauvre chérie, va !*”

I remember that phrase, because, for some time after, she never looked at me without repeating it in the same tone of compassion. Indeed, with my thinness and careworn expression, I must have seemed to the eyes of the fat jolly soul deplorable indeed.

We were in the room that had been the shop. It was low-ceilinged, but large and very light and bright by reason of the long window with the white muslin curtains, the flowers, and many pictures hung upon the painted walls ; but that which astonished me greatly was the surprising neatness and cleanliness of everything, for really this was the first time in my life that I had ever seen the inside of a decent room ; and next to this the table which was laid for lunch excited my wonder. There was a vase of cut



flowers in the middle of the spotless table-cloth and in the plate set for Taras stood a small loaf set up in a white serviette which would have made me laugh if I had not been so perplexed by the strangeness of everything. The quantity of food also seemed quite ludicrous too. It was the ordinary hour for dinner, and all that was prepared for the repast of a great hearty man was a box of sardines, a plate of radishes, and some butter; and Mère Lucas brought nothing more except a cover for me and a bottle of wine, which she stood on a small silver plate.

We sat down, and seeing Taras take the loaf out and spread the serviette over his knees I did the same, though it seemed to me about the oddest thing in the world, and then he passed the sardines for me to help myself. I could very well have eaten all the little fishes there were in the box, but out of consideration for him, who was three times as big as me, I only took about a quarter of the contents, and I also

took about a quarter of the number of radishes, but I could not help looking at Taras in surprise when he took but two sardines and only three or four radishes. "Well, however does he live?" I asked myself.

"May I fill your glass?" he asked, taking up the bottle; "or would you like beer instead?"

"I ain't partic'lar," I said; "winde's good enough for me."

The wine made me shudder; "four half" was nectar in comparison with such sour stuff, I thought; however, I gulped it down, and said nothing, not to appear too nice. I had scraped out my plate and was screwing up my courage to tell Taras that I would finish up the box if he didn't want any more when Mère Lucas bustled in, whisked off our plates, knives, and forks, and set others in their place, though the cutlery was as bright and clean as if it had just come from the makers; then she placed a steaming dish on a stand.

“Come,” said I to myself, “here’s duff to fill up with at any rate.”

But I found that it was a savoury dish—*macaroni au gratin*, I know now—and it was not half bad; besides which there was plenty of it, and to my great relief Taras took all that I left. Then in came another dish—cutlets, with paper frills round the bones, and potatoes frothed up in a fashion as odd as anything else; and by this time I began to wonder when this sort of thing was going to end. However, there was no more to eat except fruit after that, for which I was thankful, as my appetite was fully satisfied, and I did not like to refuse lest Taras should think I was displeased with my food. But the oddity of the whole meal was capped by Mère Lucas bringing in a large bright pot after dessert, and filling two small cups with hot coffee, which we had to drink without milk.

“I usually smoke a pipe with my coffee,” said Taras; “do you object?”

“Garn!” I replied; “it ain’t likely.”

He filled his pipe slowly in grave silence, and I watched him, trembling with anxiety; for I felt that he was about to decide my fate. He had not yet spoken a word with regard to my future, waiting until my bodily needs were satisfied and my mind was in a better condition to grasp fresh ideas, before opening a subject which to him at least was of such weighty importance.

"I have been very silent," he said after lifting his eyes and regarding me for a moment with kindly solicitude, "because I have had a great deal to settle in my own mind. But that is settled now, and if you like we will talk about——" he turned his chair round so as to face me, and added, after a silent puff at his pipe, "about to-morrow."

"'To-morrer!'" I echoed; "what's a-goin' to happen then?"

"That is what we must try to decide. To-morrow at nine o'clock I shall go to the pottery where I work——"

“ You ain’t goin’ to send me away till nine to-morrer mornin’ ? ” said I joyfully.

“ No. Mère Lucas will take care of you to-night. Have you any notion what you shall do after ? ”

“ Yes,” I replied resolutely. “ I made my mind up to it while I was in the station ’us. I shall go back to Shadwell. ’Tain’t no good. I got to live and face it out like the rest on us. And I can’t get a livin’ where I ain’t known. I’ll go back to the ‘Joy.’ Dessay I’ll get off with a punch or two; then Putty ’ll come round and give me a job, cause he knows I don’t nick the beer nor the coppers.”

“ I think I must ask one question. Are you related to that man in any way ? ”

“ Not me. I don’t ’member ever havin’ no rel’tives.”

“ He is not even a friend ? ”

“ I told you I ain’t got no friends—not one. If I had, do you think I should ha’ gone and

done what I did down there in the meshes Greenwich way?"

He shook his head. Then, after a pause, he asked me if I thought I could do something better than go back to the old life.

"No," said I; "I can't think of nothink else as I'm fit for and as would do me better. Can you?"

"Yes," he replied, laying down his pipe; and leaning forward, with a new light flashing in his deep, earnest eyes, he continued: "I can think of something much better. You are fitter for a new life than the old."

"You don't mean a institootion?" I asked, chilled to the heart with the dread that he should think me worse even than I was, as I recollected the proposals made with regard to living a new life made by the missionary who visited me in the station-house cell.

"No, I do not mean anything of the sort," he replied with a flash of angry repugnance in his eyes. "On the contrary, I am thinking of

removing you from all associations with the world you have lived in and its people—of placing you in a position where nothing shall recall the past—of separating you from previous conditions as completely as if you were to be born again upon another earth. To do that you must think that your life begins from to-day ; that the part of your life in the past is blotted out. You must abandon all the ways and customs to which you have been used ; even the language, such as it is, that you speak to-day must be changed for a new one. Every link in the chain that connects you with the past must be broken. You must begin just like a child who has everything to learn. Do you understand me ? ”

“ I’m a-gettin’ at it. Here, it’s like as if I’d never been picked up out of the river and was just a-goin’ straight to heaven, ain’t it ? ”

“ What is your notion of heaven ? ”

“ Well, I’ve heerd say it’s a kinder place

where you don't have to do nothin' but sit about and enj'y yourself and never want anything more'n you've got."

"Then it isn't at all like that. For you will have more to do than you have done yet a while, and there will be pain as well as pleasure; and you will never cease to want something better than you have."

"It stands to reason I must do a lot if I'm to learn everythink like a kid, and how I'm goin' to do it's a licker if I ain't to speak my own language."

"Learn another."

It puzzled me to see how this was to be done, until, seeing my perplexity, Taras said, "We will help you—Mère Lucas and I."

"Will you, master?" said I, my heart leaping with delight at the prospect this promise opened. "I'll do just whatever you tell me—as fur as I can. But I ain't clever."

"That remains to be seen."

"I can't write nor nothink."



“ You will soon learn to write with those long fingers.”

“ But what am I to do for a livin’ all the time I’m a-learnin’ ? ”

“ It will be time enough to think of that when you have learnt what you can do best. Mère Lucas will always find something for us to eat and drink, and there’s a room upstairs which you can have for yourself.”

“ What ! ” I exclaimed. “ Here, ain’t you goin’ to send me away from this place ? ”

“ Not while you wish to stay.”

I could not help it—something rose in my heart and seemed to choke me with a joy too great to bear—the tears would come into my eyes. However, I tried to hide them from him, and turning away as if to look round the room I said, as clearly as emotion would let me—

“ I shall have to be awful neat and nice if I’m to live in such rooms as this here.”

“ I daresay you will find Mère Lucas a severe teacher in that matter.”

“And,” still keeping my head turned, “I got to be awful good if I’m to be”—here another sob choked me for a moment or two—“a friend like of yours. . . . It’ll be dreadful long ’fore I learn enough for that.”

“That’s the easiest lesson of all,” said he. “There’s only one rule to remember if you would be good, and that rule governs rich and poor, witty and simple, all human beings from one end of the earth to the other: it is simply to be honest and treat me and others as you would have me and others to treat you.”

Could that be all? I asked myself. Could that rule alone make him so good to me? It took me a long while to realise that the practice of this simple doctrine made him so admirable.

“And now, little friend,” said he, taking up his pipe and lighting it again, “as the general idea seems pretty clear, let us come to practical particulars. What shall we do this afternoon for a beginning?”

“Whatever you tell me to do I’ll try and do it, master.”

“Call me Taras—that is my name.”

I heard his name then for the first time, and it seemed as strange and uncommon as any part of this new life.

“Taras,” I repeated. “What is my name to be?”

“Why, to be sure, you must have a new name.” And then, after searching for a minute or two in silent thought he said, “I think we will call you Aura. It is pleasant to the ear, and it has a pretty significance.”

I know now that Aura is a diminutive form of a word that means the nymph, or second state of the chrysalis before it takes wings.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FIRST STEP.

“WE must think about clothes next, Aura,” said Taras when I had agreed to accept the strange name he proposed. “You will want quite a lot of things—some to wear indoors, some to go out in, others to change, and so on.”

“Why, I ain’t got no money,” said I, taken aback by the very first condition of living in a new and civilised world.

“Luckily I have—somewhere,” said he, feeling in his pockets. “Ah, here it is!”

“A lot o’ things ’ll cost a lot o’ money,” I remarked as he looked in his purse.

“That’s true. If there’s not enough here to

pay for all you buy, giye one of these cards, and have the things sent home to be paid for on delivery."

I looked in the purse and saw gold—more than I had ever before seen at one time. My utmost possession had never amounted to more than a shilling, and no one had thought fit to trust me with a larger sum. I laid the purse down with a vague feeling that I might be taking undue advantage of Taras' generosity. When he spoke I stopped him.

"Hold on," said I; "I'm tryin' to think this out. I ain't sure whether I oughter take all this money or didn't oughter."

"Good. Puzzle it out, and take it or refuse it as it seems to you right or wrong."

I stuck my knuckles in my hips, drew a long breath, and taxed my sluggish power of reasoning to its utmost, while Taras smoked on in grave silence—too considerate to suffer any sign to appear in his face of the amusement my perplexity must have given him.

“Taras,” said I at length, “I’m a-goin’ to take that money, ’cause if you was in want and I had money I should like you to take it off me.”

“Bravo, little friend!” said he, joyfully. “You have grasped the meaning of the golden rule already. Now you had better go out and buy what you want. Do you know the neighbourhood?”

“No; but if you tell me where the shops is I’ll find ’em. I ain’t afraid of asting my ways.”

“Either of the streets that pass the church will lead you into the Westminster Bridge Road, where there are plenty of shops.”

I nodded, but made no movement, for the question what sort of things would be suitable to my new state threw me into another spell of cogitation.

“Would you like Mère Lucas to go with you?” Taras asked.

“If you think she knows better ’an me what I oughter wear.”

“I would rather you exercised your own judgment. I want you to walk alone as soon as possible.”

I understood what he meant by that phrase. It was really as if I were born again and learning to walk.

“You ain’t got any fancy, like? It don’t matter to you what I wear, do it?”

“Oh yes it does,” he replied with a laugh. “I should be sorry to see you in rags or ugly clothes.”

“Well, look here,” said I, after scratching my head in troubled meditation for a minute or two, “I’ll do the best I ken.”

With that I left him, but before I reached the Westminster Bridge Road I had to stop two or three times to “do a think ” over the problem before me ; and the question was not satisfactorily solved when I found myself in the street of shops. A milliner’s gay display attracted me first, and bearing in mind that Taras objected to anything ugly, I fixed my attention on a hat with a high

crown and turned-up rim of crushed strawberry plush, with two ostrich feathers, one emerald and the other magenta, drooping gracefully down the back. This seemed to my eyes the most lovely thing imaginable, and I think I should have gone in and bought it had it not suddenly occurred to me that I had seen something in this style on high days and holidays in Shadwell, and that I was to sunder myself entirely with all modes of the past. Then a little further on a show of silk handkerchiefs for the neck, spotted and flowered in bright yellow and other vivid hues, appealed once more to my sense of the beautiful. But here again I was confronted by a memory of ladies from Jamaica Road going off on Whit Monday to Epping Forest in a van. The same consideration drew me away from fancy boots and a mantle-maker's, where my eyes were fascinated by a long stamped velvet jacket with a trimming of beads and bright steel.

“Whatever in the world am I to wear?” I



asked myself, coming to a stand once more under the railway arch, and folding my arms upon my chest in desperation. "Is there anything any ways pretty that they *don't* wear in Shadwell?"

Just at that moment my eyes fell on a girl of about my own age who was stepping into a tramcar. There was nothing about her that was ugly. On the contrary, she looked exceedingly pretty; yet, strange to say, I could not remember having ever seen any one like her in Shadwell. A light burst upon me.

"Thet's it!" said I to myself with conviction. "I got to dress like one of the hupper ten." Without further deliberation I went into the first large draper's I came to, and singling out the nicest-looking young lady behind the counter, I approached her and said—

"Here, I want a set o' clothes like what you're got on."

The young lady regarded me in frigid astonishment for a moment, and then, with-

out deigning any reply, moved away to another part of the counter. After waiting a reasonable time for her return, and finding myself neglected, I turned round and appealed to a shopwalker who had his eye on me.

“Here, ain’t nobody goin’ to serve me?” I asked.

“What do you want, my good girl?” he asked in a patronising tone.

“Why, I’ve told the young woman up there. I wants a reg’lar outfit. An’ you needn’t run away with the idea as I ain’t got enough to pay for it, ’cause I have. There you are,” said I, opening the purse. “An’ if thet ain’t enough, you’re to send the things home to the party as give me that there card, and they’ll be paid for on ’livery.”

He looked at the card, and instantly called in a loud, peremptory tone—

“Forward, Miss Hopkins,” and as the stony young lady came down with a flush on her face, he added, with the same severity, “be

good enough to give this young lady every attention."

Looking daggers, Miss Hopkins asked me what I wanted.

"I told ye oncet; I'm goin' to dress 'xac'ly same as what you are;" and, examining her dress, I added, "gimme some collars and cuffs with buttons in 'em like yourn."

"One pair?" asked Miss Hopkins, taking the cuffs from a box.

"No. Three sets of everythink; and the best you're got."

"Anything else?"

"Course; gimme a frock like yourn."

"You will have to have that made. It's not my department."

"Well, ain't you got nothin' I can wear now?"

"Show the young lady that line in tea gowns," said the shopwalker.

Miss Hopkins brought me a tea gown in pale pink silk with pleats from the neck, telling

me it was the right length and would fit me, as it was intended to be worn loose. It gave me a thrill of delight only to look at it, and my satisfaction was completed by the perfect assurance that I had never seen anything like it in Shadwell.

"That's the sort of frock you'd wear to walk out in along of a gentleman, ain't it?" I asked.

"No; this is only for indoors."

"I'll have it."

Something quiet, but still lovely, in morning gowns was offered, and I had one of them; and also a dark skirt which I might wear with a jersey as a walking dress.

"Is that all?" asked Miss Hopkins when she had got thus far.

"Tain't likely! What else are you got on?"

The young woman flushed again with indignation at this question; however, as the shop-walker still hovered near, she was constrained to

answer me, and in this way I got all that was requisite for indoor wear.

"I think that is everything," said Miss Hopkins, looking at the pile of things I had bought.

"Hold on!" said I. "What do you wear outside when you're a walkin'?"

"I wear a sealskin jacket," she replied, with a little dignity in her voice.

"Let's have a look at it."

The stately shopwalker himself fetched me a jacket.

"This is the only one we have in stock that will fit you," he said, laying it down tenderly before me.

I looked at and touched the beautiful skin in silent delight.

"The price," said the shopwalker with slight hesitation, "is fifteen guineas, which includes a toque to match."

"Give us a liker at the togue," said I in doubt. But the small fur cap ravished me; the

name itself showed that it could never have been worn in Shadwell.

“ We could say fifteen pounds for the jacket and toque,” said the shopwalker as these reflections passed through my mind.

“ It ain’t what you call cheap, is it ? ” said I.

“ Pardon me, madam, it is very cheap indeed.”

“ Then I won’t have it,” said I firmly, but with an inner sigh of disappointment.

However, on the shopwalker explaining that he had employed the term relatively, that no better fur could be bought in London, and that the “ article ” was fit for a duchess to wear, I altered my decision and told him “ I’d take it and chance it.”

Some gloves and other things suggested by Miss Hopkins, who became quite amiable in the end, completed my purchases ; and as they amounted to a great deal more than Taras’s purse contained, it was arranged that they should be sent home with a bill.

“ You send ’em on sharp, ’cause I wants to put ’em on,” said I ; and then, after getting some information from Miss Hopkins with respect to the kind of boots she wore and where she bought them—at a shop, the very best in London she assured me, and only just across the road—I went off to finish shopping with a fluttering sense of exultation which had not hitherto presented itself to my imagination in the wildest dream of happiness.

This mental excitement sharpened my wits wonderfully. I felt I had the key to the mystery of that new life which had so perplexed me at first in finding out what distinguished the better class of people from those among whom I had lived and in adopting their peculiar ways. To be good and nice I must imitate Taras and Miss Hopkins. I had noticed that this young lady’s hands and nails were very clean, that her hair was carefully arranged, and also that she walked with an elastic and nimble step and an upright carriage, very different from my shuffling gait

and slovenly bearing. So I lifted my feet from the ground, straightened my back, and stepped out briskly for Lambeth, with my parcel of boots under my arm, and my imagination teeming with hopeful ideas.

Mère Lucas opened the door, and, taking me upstairs, showed me a room which she made me understand was to be mine. Then, laying her hand on my arm, carefully mouthing her words, and speaking in a loud voice that I might better understand her, she made me a little speech, beginning with "*Que je vous dise, ma pauvre petite ma'mselle*"—a phrase which I remember also because of its frequent after-recurrence—and ending with a hearty laugh when she found that I failed altogether to make anything out of it. This laugh, however, she checked suddenly with the recollection of my pitiable condition, and giving me a pat on the cheek she wound up with a tender "*pauvre chérie, va!*" and left me to myself.

It was a pleasant room, with two windows



looking out on to the river, plainly furnished, but with a delightfully fresh and wholesome look about it, due, perhaps, to the whiteness of the linen, the muslin curtains, and the extreme neatness and cleanliness of everything. Taras had given it up to me, removing the things he needed to the garret overhead while I was out spending his money. The only thing he had overlooked was a revolver hanging on the wall over the head of the bedstead. If I had seen that I might have known that the room was his; but my eyes strayed no further than the pile of packages from the draper's on the table between the windows. With eager delight I unpacked the things, and having spread them out to advantage I stood in the midst quite bewildered with the æsthetic rapture afforded me by my lovely gown and jacket, my laces and frills, and the pride of possessing such a quantity of beautiful clothing. Then, impelled by an intense feeling of gratitude, I rushed downstairs to fetch Taras that

he might share my joy in looking at the things.

He was not in the living room. Led by the sound of a voice humming a merry air, I made my way into the kitchen, where Mère Lucas sat preparing a salad surrounded by a galaxy of shining copper vessels hung symmetrically on the walls. I made her understand my want by saying "Taras" again and again. "Attendez, pauvre petite amie," said she, setting down her basin and rising. Then, taking me to the clock, she pointed to the six, held up six fingers, and said, as distinctly and as loudly as she well could, "Six heures . . . pauvre chérie, va!"

## CHAPTER X.

### I AM INTRODUCED TO KAVANAGH.

I RETURNED to my room with the ecstatic pleasure before me of trying on everything and preparing a great surprise for Taras. In this delicious occupation I spent two hours, and the time was not a minute too long for my requirements. There were unforeseen difficulties to overcome. Some of the garments, and the method of fastening them, were as strange to me as they would have been to a savage; my hands would not become white like Miss Hopkins's, and the more I scrubbed them the redder they seemed to grow; and when I came to dressing my hair I thought I never should succeed in making it presentable. It was so rebellious through

having had its own way all my life that no amount of brushing would make it lie flat and smooth. However, the brushing made it very lustrous, and I contrived at last to fasten it up in loose curls on my head with the tortoiseshell pins Miss Hopkins had advised me to buy. The choice of dress gave me less trouble: that pink silk tea gown was too lovely to be set aside.

I had only just got the fastenings right when I heard the street door shut, and the sonorous voice of Taras calling to Mère Lucas below. I lit the lamp that stood on the table, and, with doubt and hope palpitating in my heart, looked in the glass. I could scarcely believe that the reflection I saw there was my own. To be sure I was unused to the luxury of mirrors, and now, for the first time, perhaps, looked at myself with interest; still, I had seen my face often enough to believe that all the taunts it drew from the malicious wits of Ferry-boat Stairs were merited. But now, as I gazed in

the glass, I was almost frightened by the change made in my appearance by a beautiful dress, the care I had bestowed on my hair, and, still more, by the expression of eager hope which animated my features. It seemed to me that I was no longer ugly, but, on the contrary, nicer even than Miss Hopkins. Would Taras think so also, and like me the better for it? I asked myself as I ran downstairs.

I opened the door with a trembling hand, and went into the living room. It was softly lit by half a dozen wax candles. Taras was reading. Hearing my steps, he lifted his eyes and glanced across the table; then laying down his book and rising, he exclaimed, "Aura!" in a low tone of astonishment, and stood for a moment regarding me in silent wonder.

"Don't ye like it?" I asked, taking his silence for a token of displeasure.

"Why, that's just what takes my breath away. I never dreamt of such a marvellous change as this," and then he said something

about my bursting out winged from the chrysalis, which I did not then understand.

“Then ye do like it?” said I, brightening up under the signs of approval in his face and voice.

“Of course I do. It’s charming in every way. Why, you make the room look ten times brighter.”

“You won’t find anything like this down Shadwell way,” said I, turning round that he might see the long pleats behind. “But I ain’t got my hair right yet.”

“Then I hope you never may, for it cannot look better.”

“I’m glad you like my dress, anyhow, ’cause I got a lot more upstairs—none on ’em cheap; and a sealskin jacket, and gloves with ever so many buttons, and all manner.”

“Bravo!” said he, rubbing his hands with a smile; “there’s nothing like doing things thoroughly, Aura.”

Many a teacher, having indulged my caprices

with so liberal a hand, would have taken this opportunity to draw an instructive moral from it, and show that the great advantage of wearing beautiful clothes was to elevate the sentiments and produce a delicacy of feeling in harmony with the surroundings; but Taras was too generous to make my pleasure the means of advancing his own object, and but for this hint at thoroughness I might have thought that his satisfaction arose solely from having something more cheerful and bright to look at than the depressing object I had been.

“My shoes is a caution,” I said, stepping out into the light and drawing back my skirts to show the glittering buckles.

“Pleasant to walk in too, I should say.”

“Walk! I feel like as if I could a’most dance in ’em, I’m that light. Just like a dream, where you feel’s if you could fly. An’ it don’t seem real neither; it kinder frightens me to think as I may wake up presently and find myself on the sacks up in the corner of Baxter’s Wharf.”

“Turn it about—say that this is the awakening, and Baxter’s Wharf the dream to be forgotten.”

I tried to realise that; but my heart and brain gave way under the strain put upon them.

“It’s too much for me all at once,” I said, struggling with my hysterical emotion. “It’s more’n I ken bear. Don’t you say another word to me just for a minute or two, or I’ll make a fool of myself again.” But though he did not speak, and I turned away biting my lip to stop its quivering, the tears would spring in my eyes and choking sobs rise in my throat.

“I’m a-goin’ off, I think,” said I, with a queer laugh at length. “It ain’t so much these close and things—it’s this kindness as comes over me. I ain’t used to it. This is twice I’ve give way like this. Here!” suddenly turning, in impatience with my weakness, “I ain’t a-goin’ to carry on this here way no more. I’m goin’ to be reg’lar good, I am.”



Taras nodded approvingly, and, placing a chair for me, seated himself.

“There’s the purse you give me ; I’ve only paid for the boots out of it,” said I, offering the purse.

“Keep it ; you are sure to want other things. You may see some ornament that you would like for your room—this would look homelier for a few trifles such as you girls delight in.”

“There’s somethin’ in here, though, as I must give you, ’cause——” Not knowing what excuse to make I took out the iron ring I had stolen from him in silence and held it out to him with a shamed face.

He took it with a smile, and, putting it on, told me that if I wanted it again I should have it, but in a tone which led me to think that there was more in his words than I then understood.

At that moment Mère Lucas entered the room with the soup, and her exclamations of astonishment as she recognised me in my new

gown gave a new turn to our thoughts. Having set down the tureen, she stepped back, and putting her hands on her hips surveyed me from head to foot with smiling admiration, while she conveyed her thoughts in confidential but perfectly audible asides. I distinguished only the words “*élégante*” and “*propre*,” but these just served to whet my appetite for flattery.

“She says I’m elegant and proper, but what else does she say?” I asked eagerly.

“Ah! to understand *Mère Lucas*’s compliments you must learn French,” Taras replied, laughing. “Come, let us see if her dinner isn’t just as nice.”

“Dinner!” I exclaimed, “why, we’ve had one. How many do you have a day, for goodness’ sake?”

That dinner stands out in my recollection as the most delightful I have ever had. There was a greater variety of dishes than at lunch, and each—especially a wonderful gateau prepared expressly for me—was a fresh surprise. The

candles, clustered round a bouquet of bright flowers and delicate grasses, shed a soft light over the table, the silver glittered, and the wine shone like ruby in the glasses. It afforded me great satisfaction to be able, after one or two little accidents, to hold my knife and fork as Taras did; to forego the habit of resting my elbows on the table; and to find that after all, thanks to my large French serviette, I had not made a single spot on my new gown.

When we had finished our little cups of black coffee, I ventured to ask Taras what he usually did in the evening.

“Well, usually I saunter along the Embankment for half an hour or so,” he replied.

“Would you mind me going along with you, jest for once?” I asked.

He glanced at my dress with a moment’s hesitation, and then, overcoming his qualms, said that he should be very happy to take me.

“Jest you wait a bit,” said I, jumping up; “I’ll be down in a jiffy.”

The “jiffy,” I fear, must have been a rather tedious one to Taras, but at length I came down in my dark skirt, my sealskin jacket and toque, and a pair of pale kid gloves.

“What d’ye think of me now?” I asked in exultation, for, looking in the glass, I had discovered that the jacket disguised my meagre figure even more than the loose tea gown had, and gave me quite nice proportions, while the dark toque seemed to give brilliancy to my eyes by throwing up the paleness of my complexion. And then my gloves, though they had driven me almost to tears with the vexatious difficulty of drawing on and buttoning, now added the one indispensable touch to the general effect; no one would dream that my hands were red inside them!

I think Taras purposely restrained himself from saying all he felt, for fear that praise might do more harm than good at this time, and I felt a little disappointment when he said very quietly that my dress was lady-like and graceful. Mère

Lucas, however, coming in to remove the cups, fully made up for his deficiency by expressing her admiration in repeated exclamations of rapture, tempered by words of profound respect.

We walked over Westminster Bridge and along the Embankment to the Temple, and then back. My walking boots were tight and pinched my feet cruelly ; but had the pain been ten times sharper I could have borne it cheerfully and without a murmur. Indeed, I almost exulted in this suffering and in the effort to conceal the slightest trace of it from Taras, with the feeling, in a minor degree, of a martyr enduring torture for a great cause. The gain to me was nothing less than tremendous. But yesterday girls stopped to laugh in my face and jeer at my grotesque distress ; now they glanced at me with looks of envy. There was nothing ludicrous in my appearance, nothing anomalous in my walking beside a well-dressed gentleman. I appeared to be his equal.

Taras himself seemed pleased to have a com-

panion to talk to—not that I said much, for I was unused to taking any part in conversation ; my powers of forming ideas and expressing them were wholly undeveloped, and my chief anxiety was to hold my shoulders back like Miss Hopkins, and to find a gait which was neither shuffling nor jerky. He knew my inability to talk, and so kept up an easy running chat which called for nothing beyond “yes” or “no” on my part. I remember he told me the history of Mère Lucas’s life—how years ago she had starved with her husband in besieged Paris, when even the rich could not get food ; how she had fought beside him on the barricades where he was killed ; how she herself narrowly escaped being shot with other Communists only to be transported to an island thousands of miles from her country and friends ; and how on her return to Paris she found her children dead and not a friend to help her.

“She don’t look like as if she’d gone through all that,” said I.

“No; time brings forgetfulness, thank God!” he replied. But it struck me even then that the old woman owed more to his humanity than to time.

A gentleman stood with his hand on the knocker as we reached our door.

“Come in. I am glad to see you,” said Taras, opening the door with his key; and then as we entered the living room he introduced us in the simplest manner.

“Barry Kavanagh—Aura.”

He was a handsome man, handsomer than Taras in some respects, but of a different type. He was slighter, more delicately moulded, with long, perfectly regular features, a dark skin, black hair and moustache, and the loveliest soft, sleepy eyes of deep brown. He was ten years older than Taras, but he looked still more, lacking that expansive simplicity which gave youth to my friend's face. Their dress alone distinguished the different character of the two. Taras, in his loose, light tweed suit, flannel shirt

and soft, carelessly-tied neckerchief, looked like a worker; Kavanagh's tight-fitting dark coat, rigid collar and scarf, and perfect gloves, gave him the air of a well-to-do idler—a man of the world and society.

He inclined his head to me with serious courtesy and a certain homage in his regard which every friend of Taras commanded from those who knew him. I did not even nod in reply, but setting my hands behind me, leant against the wall, and looked at him with, I fear, very ill-concealed dislike—the warmth with which Taras greeted him having aroused the first hostile sense of jealousy in my breast.

The two men spoke lightly on general topics while Taras brought out cigars and a spirit case, Kavanagh with studious politeness framing his phrases to include me, and inviting me by an occasional glance to join in the conversation; but I lolled against the wall in moody silence, and stared at him under my bent brows for response. At length Taras, perceiving that his



visitor remained standing, said to me with a laugh—

“Barry Kavanagh will never sit down while you stand, Aura.”

“Garn aw’y!” I said, in a husky, guttural tone of disgust. “What ’olds ’im? He ain’t ’bliged for to stand ’cause I chooses to, is he?”

This pretty little speech coming from the lips of an elegantly dressed young lady, and the friend of Taras, must have given Kavanagh a violent shock; and indeed, despite the self-command of good breeding, a flash of astonishment did pass over his face.

Without waiting to hear his rejoinder, I jerked myself into an upright posture, slowly walked out of the room, and slammed the door to behind me.

## CHAPTER XI.

KAVANAGH.

A HUSHED laugh from the room I had quitted reached my ear and caused me to stop at the foot of the stairs. The suspicion that I was the object of merriment stung my newly awakened pride. Jealous already of Kavanagh's influence, and attributing to him the same feeling of animosity that rankled in my heart, I conceived that he would take advantage of my absence to make Taras hate me. A growing desire to hear what he would say against me, to know whether Taras would stand by me or yield to his friend, impelled me to steal back to the door, where I put my ear to the keyhole.

Kavanagh was speaking in a low, musically running tone.

“That’s the worst of equality when it is practised by a thorough-going man like you—one never knows what to expect, and may get a douche like this at any moment. One day you introduce me to a man with an insignificant name and the look of a broken-down tradesman, and I find later on that he’s a royal duke, and now—thanks, I’ll help myself if I may.”

“And now, what did you take this friend to be?” Taras asked in a tone of amusement.

“An illustrious refugee at the least. A princess, probably, by her dress, *distingué* style, and a distinctly aristocratic cut of features—probably an exceptionally learned princess. There was the eccentricity of genius in her silence, the *sans gêne* with which she reclined against the wall and stared at me—to say nothing of a decidedly unamiable expression in those fine eyes of hers. Yes, I would have laid ten to one in anything that she was an

illustrious refugee — before she opened her lips.”

“ Then you altered your opinion ? ”

“ Well, yes.”

There was a pause. And here I may observe that in giving this dialogue, and others, I write many words which were not then in my vocabulary, and it must be understood that I give but a very free translation of certain well-remembered impressions.

“ By the way,” added Kavanagh, “ I hope I was not indiscreet in accepting your invitation.”

“ I should not have asked you to come in if I had not wanted to have a chat with you : something more than a chat—a serious talk. I should have hunted you up to-morrow for this very purpose.”

“ You have the pleasantest way of making a man feel welcome. What is the subject ? ”

“ The girl who has just left the room. In the first place, Barry Kavanagh, there must be

no misconception with regard to her position here."

"My dear fellow, no one whose opinion is worth consideration would ever dream of doubting your honour or the honesty of your relations with this young woman."

"That idea never entered my imagination. It is quite another kind of misconception that I wish to avoid. Come, you are one whose opinion is worth consideration; tell me candidly what conclusion you have formed with regard to her in place of the illustrious refugee theory."

"I should say that she is some unhappy waif whom you have rescued from the slough of despair and the slums of Whitechapel, with an object as wildly impracticable as it is profoundly charitable."

"That is the misconception that I feared," said Taras in a low, earnest voice, contrasting strongly with the light tone of his friend. "I want you to understand that the girl owes

nothing to any sentiment of charity on my part, in order that no chance word or accidental look may convey such a suspicion to her mind. If I gave her all that I possess in the world, down to the last farthing, it would not repay what I owe her. But for the daring, the bravery, and the endurance of that slight, frail-looking girl, I might now be on the road to Siberia."

"Good Heavens! I have not heard a word of this."

"It has all happened since I saw you last. I told you the police would not let me alone, and they have not. They laid a trap for me, and I walked into it with the simplicity of a child, mainly, I think, because the agent employed to take me represented himself to be an ex-convict, and looked the character so perfectly that I never suspected him to be something worse. Usually, you know, the police agent looks impeccable. They got me down in a cellar bound hand and foot and gagged. I could not get my hands free, but I worked the

cord off my feet and ate through my gag. There was a pipe in the cellar, and through that I communicated with the girl whose voice I heard overhead. At the risk of her life she contrived to get herself into the cellar and me out of it. A vessel—from which I had been led to believe that three refugees were to be rescued—lay in the Pool waiting for me, and most likely I was to have been carried aboard and shipped off to St. Petersburg the very night that this brave girl saved me.”

“Thank Heaven you escaped! Give me your hand, old man. To think that I might have found this room empty—that I might never have smoked another pipe with you!”

“You can understand now my feeling towards that girl.”

“By George, it’s a heavy debt!” Then in a reflective tone he added, after a pause, “I see. You propose to raise this girl to your own level.”

“Higher if I may. I aim at giving her a

new life. Does that prospect seem to you 'wildly impracticable'?"

"What does it matter what I think? If all the world declared it impossible you would not abandon the attempt."

"No. But it does matter whether you regard the attempt as useless or not."

"Why?"

"I will tell you plainly. You admit, surely, that we owe much to surrounding conditions."

"Nearly everything; women especially yield to the influence of circumstances. Still, in this case the practical difficulties are enormous. You see, there's a vast difference between beginning life at twenty or thereabouts and starting from the cradle. There is so much to be unlearned. For example, if your young friend is to exist in civilised society she must unlearn that awful dialect of hers. Now, try as I may to speak English as she is spoken in London, my speech betrays that I am an Irishman; and if you ask me to believe that a wholly uneducated girl can



succeed in doing more, I should feel inclined to reply in her own words—‘garn away’!”

“It is a barbarous tongue,” Taras assented gravely; “although,” he added in a more cheerful tone, “it is less offensive to my ear than the affected errors of pronunciation and the detestable drawl of your superior class, Barry Kavanagh. It is less aggressive, for one thing, and then, because her faults are not affected, reform is not so desperately hopeless. The girl may be persuaded to change her own language for another. In a few months she may learn French; when she can think in that language she will learn as quickly to express her ideas in tolerable English.”

“You have set yourself an enormous task.”

“Oh, less depends upon the teacher than the pupil. If she wishes to learn I do not see—to use another expression of hers—‘what holds her.’”

“Ah! that’s the question, my dear fellow—has she the wish or the power to learn?”

“ I am certain that she has. She has given proof in these first few hours of an astonishing ability to adapt herself to new conditions. But if the case were less hopeful, if I clearly foresaw that she would weary of our ways, rebel against civilisation, and finally return to the freedom and abandon of the slums, I would still make this effort. She has saved my life : I must try to save hers.”

“ She may rebel against civilisation : I should think she would ; but there’s very little likelihood of her going back to the slums. By the way, what motive had she for risking her life to save you ? ”

“ None, that I know of, but that which springs from the divine sympathy with the weak and suffering which animates all women’s souls.”

“ I abandon my position,” cried Kavanagh, impulsively, dropping a line of argument by which, I believe, he intended to warn Taras of a danger that had not suggested itself to his

simple mind. "Your big faith makes me ashamed of my pessimism—ashamed of raising obstacles when, if I could, I should be making the way smoother."

"You may help me now if you will."

"If I will! Why, there's nothing in the world that would give me greater pleasure, if it were only to prove the sincerity of an Irishman's friendship."

"If I had doubted that, I should not have said a word to you on the subject. I felt that I could rely on your help in case of need, but I would not impose a task upon you which, beforehand, seemed utterly hopeless."

"One moment, old man," said Kavanagh, with a laugh. "You are not going to hand that young lady over to me?"

"Yes. You must promise to look after her if anything happens to me."

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" cried Kavanagh with bated breath.

“I mean that you must finish what I have begun if I cannot finish it myself. I must make some provision of this kind for the poor girl. What would become of her if, in a few weeks, say, she were thrown suddenly upon her own resources? Money alone would make her position only the more perilous. Without a friend to guide her, she would be absolutely worse off than if I had left her in the slums.”

“I understand that, but what do you mean by the suggestion that something might happen to you in a few weeks?”

“I told you that the police have tried to kidnap me.”

“And failed——”

“They will be more careful next time, in consequence. They intend to take me, and probably they will. Three months ago the Minister of Police received an order from the Czar to silence me; he seldom has to repeat an order of that kind.”

“ I could not believe it when you told me.”

“ It was credible enough to me. The warning came from a reliable friend in the Minister’s household. The odd thing is that I have heard nothing since from him or other friends who watch the motions of the police. It looks as if he had found a new agent—one less known to us than the old hands.”

“ The villainous-looking scoundrel you mentioned.”

“ Oh dear no. He is only a sub-agent employed by the agent-in-chief, who himself takes care to keep out of the way. He may be directing the affair from Paris or Berlin. Certainly he would not jeopardise his own life or his position by an attack of this kind. The whole business has to be done by carefully concealed means, like one of those clocks which defy ingenuity to discover where the motive power is situated. It would never do, in case of exposure, for a known emissary of the Russian Government to be implicated in a conspiracy

against the freedom of a subject on British soil.

“That did not occur to me at the moment. What steps have you taken since this attempt?”

“Made my will, and——”

“Surely they will not attempt to assassinate you?” Kavanagh said quickly, interrupting Taras.

“Assassinate me—no. The rascals have too much respect for your hangman and their own necks to venture on that. But they would not hesitate to kill me if they could justify themselves by a plea of self-defence. That might have happened the other night if they had not taken me so completely by surprise that I could offer no resistance. Every one of them had his knife ready, and I should have been cut down as sure as fate if their cords had not held me. Taking place in a villainous water-side beerhouse, my death would have been attributed to a drunken brawl, and, all evidence of my

identity being removed, it is doubtful if the papers would take any notice of the inquest. It was all calculated to a nicety ; the agent must have gone over the ground and mapped it out clearly. I would give anything to know who he is."

"It is horrible to fight in the dark. You never know when the blow may fall."

"No, nor who may strike it—that's the worst part of the business. It shakes one's faith. The man you trust turns out to be an enemy—your favourite haunt a nest of spies—anything may happen at any moment. I fancy they will give me a respite now ; I am all right for a time."

"How long? Have you any idea?"

"Probably till they find me getting careless and off my guard, unless they receive a peremptory order for despatch from headquarters."

"You speak as if you were careless already, old fellow," said Kavanagh ruefully.

"But I am not," Taras replied in a more earnest tone. "I was about to say that, having made my will, and got your promise to look after Aura in case of accident—you do promise me that?"

"Oh yes, yes, yes," the friend replied almost carelessly.

"Then I shall tell Cunningham, the lawyer in Lincoln's Inn, to communicate with you the first morning that he fails to receive a card from me."

"Is it not possible," said Kavanagh, reflectively and in a tone which showed that his mind had been more occupied with his own speculations than with his friend's instruction—"is there not just a chance that the attack was intended rather as a warning than anything else, and that they would have suffered you to escape if the girl had not forestalled them? If they silenced you to-night, your works would still exist. They cannot undo them, and they know it. Sent to Siberia, you become a



martyr, and greater importance is given to your work. It seems to me that the agents—the Minister, the Czar himself—will be satisfied with this manifestation of power, and drop the affair.”

“For a while, possibly—probably indeed. But when they find that I do not profit by their warning, and will not accept their conditions of neutrality—that I am neither a child nor an old woman, to be frightened by menaces of future punishment from the course directed by my conscience——”

“But, my dear fellow, it is not as if you were still an active enemy.”

“If you think I am nothing but a passive enemy, you are wrong,” said Taras, with more fire in his voice than I had yet heard. “They *have* something to gain by my removal. For some months I have been meditating a new attack, and the Czar knows it; for he has spies in our camp as we have friends in his. I have only been waiting for the idea, and the idea

came to my mind the first time I saw Aura. I owe her that as well, poor girl. Come up with me, and I will show the shell I am preparing to throw at the Czar's feet."

As their chairs moved I slipped from the door and ran up to my room, to meditate on what I had heard and form a clearer conception of its meaning.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FIGHT FOR LIFE.

TARAS gave me his hand when we met the next morning downstairs. I took it in silence, being unprepared for this form of greeting, which I had never before exchanged with any one, and which now kindled an emotion in my breast that threw all my ideas into confusion; but before I let his warm palm leave my clinging fingers the earnest purpose I had come to in the night reasserted itself, and I said—

“Here, I’m going to begin to-day in real earnest.”

“That’s right,” said he, smiling, but with serious feeling in his deep eyes.

“ I ain’t goin’ to talk dilecks to any living soul again ’ceptin’ you. I’m goin’ to talk French like Mère Lucas does. Presen’ly I’ll go in the kitchen and p’int out things, and I’ll jist listen to her till I can make out what she’s drivin’ at. And I’m goin’ to take stock of everything you do, too, and say things softer like and more pleasant, same as what you do. And I’ll set to and learn readin’ and writin’ if you’ll only show me how—jist for a start. But I ain’t goin’ to be no ’normous trouble. I won’t be a bit more trouble ’an I can help. Whatever you tell me to do I’ll take and do it, whether I likes it or not, see ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Here ”—after swallowing my compunction—“ I heerd all what you said last night.”

“ So I perceive.”

“ When you’re a goin’ out, and don’t want to take me along of you, do you mind tellin’ me where you are goin’ and ’bout what time you’ll be home ? ”

“I am not sure that I should quite like that.”

“Oh, don’t fancy I’m goin’ to foller you about and be a nuisance. No fear! I shouldn’t like that myself. But if you didn’t turn up, say two or three hours arter the time, I might jist take a skivvey round and see if it was all right, doncher know? It shouldn’t make no difference to you, ’cause I’d take care you didn’t know it; but it ’d make a lot of difference to me, ’cause I shouldn’t have to do it underhanded like, and I should feel a lump easier.”

“In that case, I will tell you when I think of it.”

Then, seeing by my troubled look, possibly, and my silence that my mind was not yet relieved of its charge, he added—

“Anything else, little friend?”

“Yes, I got sunthin’ else to say, but it kinder sticks half way. Here, don’t you bother about makin’ ’rangements with that feller to look arter me in case anything—you know, don’t

you? I can't say it. It's too dreffle to talk about. But I don't want to be held by any one. You wouldn't like that. If you go away I shall just come arter you, and it don't matter where nor how—d'ye hear?"

There was pain in his face as he nodded assent, but to disguise the feeling he asked lightly—

"Is there nothing else?"

"Nothing 'tickler," I replied, with a sigh of relief; "I've got up the wust of it. But you might tell us what this thing is you're goin' to heave at somebody's feet, else I know I'll have to go pokin' and pryin' about to find out."

"Well, as Mère Lucas has only just taken in the milk, we can go up into the workshop and satisfy your curiosity without keeping breakfast waiting. This is a pretty frock. I have not seen it before, I think."

"Course you ain't," said I, stopping and turning round slowly, with huge delight to be admired. "Tea gowns is for arternoons, walkin'

dresses is for outdoors, but this here is for mornin's."

"I ought to have known that—it's so crisp and bright and fresh," said he.

We passed through the back yard and up a few steps into a long glazed workshop, which had been rented from the cabinet-maker next door. I looked round, expecting to see some terrible instrument. Innumerable plaster casts hung from the rafters; the end wall was covered with rough sketches in charcoal; a potter's wheel stood near the window, with a trough of clay beside it; some odd-looking tools lay on a bench, but they only looked like misshapen spoons. In the middle of the workshop, however, there was something on a stout stand, carefully enveloped in a damp cloth, and a little further on stood another stool bearing a smaller mass similarly covered. Taras went up to the larger of the two things and began carefully to remove the cloth, while I stood by waiting in eager curiosity to know what it was that

excited the animosity of the police to such an extent.

“There it is,” said Taras, lifting the last fold of the cloth, and revealing a group of three figures roughly modelled in clay.

I walked round the stand, touched the soft clay, and then, looking at Taras in perplexity, said—

“Why, it’s only images.”

“That is all.”

“Well, what harm will it do any one if you throw that at his feet? It wouldn’t kill him if you threw it at his head.”

“Ah, but this is only a sketch of a much larger one I shall make,” said he, with a twinkle of merriment in his eye. “The figures will be life size, and they will be burnt hard in a kiln, which, you see, would make a difference if it came to throwing it at anybody’s head; but that was only a manner of speaking. Come, I will make it clear to you if I can. This female figure represents my country in the last stage of



despair and humiliation; the man tearing the dress from her shoulders is a brutal executioner with an iron-thonged whip in his hand; the third figure is the Czar, who has given the order for this helpless woman to be flogged, and is standing by to see his order carried out, callous to his victim's suffering."

"What has the woman done?"

"She has dared to tell the Czar that she is not his slave."

"What's this down alongside the woman?" I asked.

"The Czar's dog—licking her hand."

"To show he's got more feelin' than what the man has?"

"That's it. You begin to see what I mean."

"Yes, but I got to learn a lump yet afore I understands it all right. What's under the other rag?"

"Only a study for the head of this woman," he said in an evasive tone.

“May I have a look at it?”

He hesitated a moment; then saying that I must see it sooner or later he uncovered the study.

It was the bust of a woman; the head was completely finished, even to the hair, which fell in tangled meshes on one shoulder. The first thing that struck me as I looked in the face was the awful expression of dull despair, the hopeless misery that pinched her emaciated and careworn features. Then it dawned upon me that I had seen the face before; it was as familiar to my recollection as the spiritual dejection, the supine misery stamped upon it.

“Why, it’s me,” I said, turning to Taras.

He nodded assent, and we both stood in silence looking at the head. The expression in the face was so vivid that it imparted its feeling to my spirit. Again my heart was chilled and numbed with despondency.

“Good Gawd!” I exclaimed. “Is it any good to hope? Shan’t I find out presently as

it's all a mistake? Can a girl with a face like that ever change it?"

"You shall see, little friend—you shall see!" cried Taras almost fiercely. And catching up a tool, with a few touches to the eyes and lips he put cheerful hope and triumphant joy into the face. It took my breath away with surprise, and then, as if by some magic spell, I caught the sense of happiness from the face I looked at.

"I shall become like that," I said, choking with delight, "and be changed, like that clay has, through you."

"We are not clay, Aura, for we live and feel; and our souls are given us that we may change ourselves and mould our character to nobler form."

"It's a comin' to me," I said, after a few moments of profound thinking. "I'm gettin' at it by a little at a time. That woman, your country, 's got a look like mine was, all mis'able and wretched like; and you're goin' to give her

new life like you're givin' me, and alter her face so as people shall hardly know her again."

"Would to Heaven I might!" he exclaimed fervently. "One life is too short for such a work—one hand too feeble. I can but hope to awaken the sympathy of humanity and start the cry of indignation which shall shame the Czar to mercy."

The group had a new interest for me. The longer I looked at it the more it fascinated me. The central figure ceased to be an image: it was a living woman suffering as I had suffered.

"I guess she feels like I felt," said I. "Like as if nothin' could make her feel wus, and it didn't matter what happened."

Taras assented.

"Better she hadn't got no soul, nor nothin'; better she was dead if she ain't got a friend to help her up and give her new life."

"That's it. But we must find friends to help her; warm the hearts of other nations towards her, and kindle a spirit of hope and

courage in that poor fainting heart; and we will if we can keep out of the hands of the police."

If he could keep out of the hands of the police! My existence also depended upon that. Recognising so much, the instinct of self-preservation inspired me with a fierce desire and determination to find out and fight this secret emissary of the Czar. The enemy once discovered I would meet cunning with cunning, dare anything, hesitate at nothing to save the man who made the world dear to me.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AN ODD DIARY.

IN my room there was a table with an empty drawer which fastened with a key. It is half full of rubbish—odds and ends of all sorts secreted there as souvenirs of those early days when I was incapable of keeping any other kind of diary. They have served their purpose. There is not a scrap which fails to recall the very sentiment of the moment when I laid it away ; and it would be easy for me to compile a minute record of my life in Lambeth from them alone. A few of these trifles will suffice to indicate the course of events during the early months of my new life.

Here, at the very bottom, are three penny

novelettes, bought for the illustrations on the cover which alone were intelligible to me. In one, "Lady Ermyntrude overhears the conspiracy," and is represented listening, with horror on her face, at a half-opened door; in another, "Gwendoline denounces the baronet," who is quailing in terror before her outstretched finger; and in the third "Beryl says 'die,' and shoots the villain"—and a most unmistakable villain he is—"through the heart." Those pictures fascinated me. The heroines were all tall and beautiful, and a couple of them were in evening dress. I put myself in their place. The ladylike accomplishment of eavesdropping I had already practised. I had only to unmask the secret enemy of Taras and shoot him through the heart to be perfectly satisfied. And the means seemed almost within my reach. The revolver had not been removed from my room. For weeks I carried that dangerous and rather cumbrous weapon in my dress pocket. I smile now at my simplicity; but my purpose was

no laughing matter then : I was in terrible earnest.

Here is a page of written characters, with trembling upstrokes that tell of cramped fingers and painful effort—the page Taras picked out of a couple of dozen to praise with encouraging words full of gentle sincerity. And next to this a tram ticket, showing that we extended our walk after dinner to Camberwell, and cherished as a memento of the delightful sense of freedom after a day of close application, and a jubilant happiness in having Taras all to myself.

The pages of writing that follow show marked improvement. Upstrokes firmer and more free. An attempt at phonetic spelling to fix in my mind the names of things learnt from Mère Lucas, who, good soul, was not less indefatigable in teaching me than I in learning. A page with more phonetic spelling bears the marks of being crumpled up in anger and thrown on to the fire. There are traces of tears on it



also. Oh, I do not need this scarred and blotted sheet to remind me of that evening ! Proud of my progress, I had shown the attempt to write words to Taras, confident of being praised, and and after examining the page for some time in perplexity he had burst into laughter. Then I snatched up the paper, crushed it up, and threw it on the fire, declaring in passionate wrath that I would never again try to please him.

“ You don’t mean that, Aura,” said he earnestly, “ unless you believe that I purposely intended to wound your feelings.”

“ Yes, I do,” I retorted, and again catching up the sheet which he had taken from the fire with the tongs, I whipped out of the room and took care to slam the door well behind me. The paroxysm of childish passion lasted but a few minutes, barely long enough for my vindictive feelings to take the form of definite resolution ; and then at the thought of estranging my only friend, and losing his affection, merely by a silly transport of temper, such a flood of contrition

and shame and remorse rushed into my heart that I burst into tears, and cried as if my heart would break. With the tears still on my cheeks I ran down to the room where Taras was sitting thoughtful by the fire.

“Here,” said I, “don’t you take any notice of what I said just now. I didn’t mean it; anyhow, I don’t mean it now. I’m a goin’ to go on a doin’ my best, whether you laugh at me or not—there!”

“My dear little friend!” he exclaimed, with evident emotion in his voice and face as he rose quickly from his chair and stepped towards me. Then, as if checking an impulse, he stopped, putting his raised hand on a chair. “Come and sit down in your old place. I never doubted your courage, or I might have been more thoughtful. Our dearest friends are those that we can laugh at sometimes.”

He lit his pipe and talked to me in a strain of generous sympathy and encouragement until the last symptoms of pain escaped my heart in

a long, fluttering sigh, and gave place to a joyous sense of restored happiness and invigorated hope. Indeed, my feeling for Taras seemed to take fresh growth from this temporary check, like a plant which throws out deeper root fibres by the nipping back of an offshoot. When our hands joined before parting for the night I was stirred by a desire to throw my arms about his neck, and the sentiment which restrained me and brought the hot blood to my cheek was the first indication of a passion in my breast stronger than friendship.

A long clasp knife marks the day when I thought I might dispense with part of the portable armoury which knocked against my knee whenever I moved about. The complete absence of fear shown by Taras, and the mild manner and innocent look of all his visitors, had greatly calmed my apprehensions, and in addition to this, a wider intelligence showed me that the hand counted for less than the brain in

coping with the subtle enemy of Taras. This conviction added an incentive to learn, which I find in the marked progress of my writing in the pages that follow. One of them shows by a long straggling line that I fell asleep over it. After saying "Good-night" to Taras I studied in my room, never giving up until I had heard Big Ben strike twelve, and when I felt particularly vigorous I would go on till two or three in the morning. It was not only French that I tried to master; my craving for knowledge extended in every direction, like a child's; and, like a child, I learnt by asking all sorts of incongruous questions, just as they rose in my mind. Taras now and then laughed at me; but whether I had grown more wise or less sensitive or whether knowing him better and with deeper affection, I felt that, laugh as he might, no contempt for ignorance or impatience with simplicity, no malice or ill-feeling, could ever hold a place in that generous heart, I cannot say, but certain it is, his mirth never again wounded my

pride or provoked me to anger. Usually, however, he took my inquiries seriously, and made his explanation so full of interest that I have often and often invented a question for the sake of the delightful gossip it was pretty sure to lead to.

One night Taras took me to the Canterbury Music Hall. Here is the programme of the spectacles which constituted two-thirds of the entertainment. I had never before been inside a theatre ; and when I stood in the stalls and looked round and above me I was quite overcome with astonishment at the vastness and brilliancy of the house.

“ I should think this is the grandest place in all the world,” I said in a lowered voice to Taras.

But from the time the curtain rose until it fell I sat so spell-bound that I never once opened my lips, forgetful even that Taras sat beside me. In the spectacle a really poetic idea

was admirably worked out in a series of pretty scenes with the aid of tuneful music, and all that an artistic fancy could suggest in grouping, dances, and beautiful costume; and the effect upon my mind is almost indescribable. It was as if new senses had been given me—new faculties called into existence. The world was richer and lovelier than ever I had imagined it; there was more in it to live for—a paradise it seemed to me against the darker side which I had known too well. Visions of grace and beauty rose before me, and delightful harmonies rang in my ears when I fell asleep that night. In the morning Taras caught me swaying to and fro to the rhythm of a tune that had come back to me.

“Good—good!” he cried, in surprise  
“You have got the air exactly. You must have a capital ear, and yet I never heard you sing a note before.”

It was the first time, to my knowledge, that I had ever had the heart to sing.

A little further on there is another programme, showing that soon after we went to the Lyceum Theatre. The play made less impression on my mind; I could not understand it all; my intelligence was not yet sufficiently expanded to comprehend the higher art; and perhaps this was why Taras took me first to the music hall. Still that evening's experience was delightful, and the long talks it led to afterwards opened quite a new field of ideas.

Very different emotions are recalled by this handkerchief, torn and shredded in a passion of furious jealousy. I must have used my teeth to rend it in this way. It was that evening when George Gordon dropped in after dinner, and Kavanagh, with a couple of friends, came in later. As usual when a visitor called, I went up to my room to avoid unpleasantness, for I had stuck scrupulously to my determination to speak English only to Taras, and I was only just beginning to make myself understood in

French to Mère Lucas. The men stayed and played cards until two in the morning, and I sat on the stairs listening to the sounds that came from below with venomous jealousy ranking in my breast, the cold sweat of rage beading my lips and brow when the jovial voice and hearty laugh of Taras reached my ear.

When the party broke up I went down, ostensibly with the pretext of saying "Good-night" to Taras, but with the covert intention of picking a quarrel—of imparting to him something of the vindictive misery I felt. Seeing my condition, he made me sit down, and, having lit a pipe, seated himself in the chair opposite and chatted about the friends who were gone, as though it were the most natural thing in the world to enter into genial conversation at that hour.

Little by little he led up to my occupation during the evening, and after bringing me by my own confession to see how childishly selfish, weak, and inconsistently foolish my jealousy



was, he drew tears of regret and shame into my eyes by a sympathetic word, and then inspired me with the consoling hope that my own self-esteem would save me from any renewal of this humiliation. A second handkerchief, scarcely crumpled, and laid away in triumph after a hard struggle with myself, shows that I profited by this lesson later on when the friends met again. Indeed, my temper was every day growing more amenable to reason, and I grew braver, and I hope better, under the gentle, humanising influences which my dear friend constantly brought to bear upon me.

A day spent in the beautiful country beyond Woking is chronicled in this bunch of withered flowers. This was a fresh revelation to me, for, with the exception of my memorable wandering to Greenwich, I had never been out of London. It was in the first week of June. We left Lambeth early in the morning; a golden haze hung over the river towards Vauxhall; West-

minster Bridge stood out clear and sharp cut against the sky. You could be quite sure that the day would be hot ; the line of sun blinds outside the shops gave me that idea as we stepped out towards the station. We were in buoyant spirits, feeling that it was good to be out in the open air and give ourselves up to pleasant impressions.

My astonishment began soon after we passed Clapham, and increased as the houses grew fewer and the expanse of country wider ; and I gave open expression to my delight, forgetting that other people were in the compartment besides Taras, until an old gentleman opposite lowered his newspaper and looked at me over the rim of his spectacles in wondering speculation. He may have thought I was on my way to a lunatic asylum ; certainly he must have found it difficult to believe that a well-dressed young woman of twenty was looking at the open country for the first time in her life. It did not matter. Taras was the last person in the

world to be ashamed of my ignorance, and I could not help bursting out into exclamations of delight now and then.

Taras caught my enthusiasm, and was as ready as I to point out any fresh aspect. When we were fairly in the country, and away from the station and people, I felt that I must sing or run or cry to give vent to my exuberant emotion. Mère Lucas had provided us with a basket of provisions, and we ate our dinner in a pine wood, smoothly carpeted with the brown, shining needles. She had forgotten nothing, as Taras, who carried the basket, knew to his cost. There were the most delicious things in it—a cold chicken wrapped in a serviette, and a salad, and a bottle of Burgundy, and cheese—everything down to a little saucepan to warm the coffee in. What fun it was making the fire, and how excellent the food was! If we had been only a quarter as hungry we must have enjoyed the meal. We had tea at a lovely old inn, and lingered on our way to the station

to hear the birds sing. These things I can tell, but the deep, deep happiness of that day is quite beyond my power of expressing.

It seemed to me as if Taras and I were one—I saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, and in my heart was a sentiment of pure, ineffable love and divine tenderness which belonged more to his nature than to mine. He picked these flowers for me: I strewed them on my pillow and pressed my burning face on their cool petals when I lay down that night.

One more extract from this odd collection shall close the list. It is a catalogue of paintings by Prince Bоргensky, exhibited at the Modern Gallery in Bond Street. I had often heard the words “Nihilism” and “Nihilist” spoken in Lambeth, and one morning when we were walking in the Park—we never failed to go out for an hour or two before lunch—I asked Taras to tell me what a Nihilist was.

“A Russian Nihilist,” said he, “is a man who desires freedom for his country such as we

enjoy here in England, if we can get it. But he would be quite content with less."

"Are you a Nihilist?" said I.

He nodded.

"Have you always been a Nihilist?" I asked.

"No. I was once a servant—I might almost say a friend—of the Czar, who is now my enemy."

"What made you become a Nihilist?"

He reflected longer than he usually did before replying to my questions, and then said—

"I will show you, Aura," and turning from the path he led me across the park and over Piccadilly into Bond Street. There we entered a large gallery which was already crowded with well-dressed people. The walls were covered with pictures; I may say without exaggerating that there were hundreds of paintings. There were some large ones representing battle scenes, and others quite small, for the most part por-

traits ; but the greater number, and those which attracted most attention, illustrated prison and exile life in Russia and scenes relating to the march of prisoners into Siberia. The misery of this awful march, the attendant horrors of the étapes where men and women, old and young, where the habitual criminal and the tenderly nurtured girl, condemned without trial by the administrative process, were herded together in loathsome kameras without regard to decency or health, and with less care for their preservation than would be bestowed upon cattle, were shown in such vivid reality that one turned with a feeling of sickness from the canvas, as if the reek of pollution and disease steamed from them.

"This is what made me a Nihilist," Taras said in a low voice.

"You have seen all this ? " I asked.

He nodded.

A plethoric young man, with long hair, was passing judgment on the pictures in the loud tone of conceit.

“Vigour, I grant you,” he said. “But the thing is overdone. The effect he aims at is spoilt by exaggeration. Borgensky may be a rabid Nihilist, but it is equally clear that he is making capital out of a political boom; in fact—” he added in a confidential tone—“he almost admitted the fact when I taxed him with it here the other day.”

“That is not true!” said Taras, raising his voice.

The knot of admirers about the stout young dilettante turned round, and the youth himself scanning Taras from head to foot, said, with impudent contempt—

“Beg pardon, may I ask who you are?”

“If you were not a liar,” replied Taras, “you would know that I am Prince Borgensky.”

It was in this way that I came to know who Taras was.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A WARNING.

ONE morning I was particularly bright and happy. Taras and I had risen early, by arrangement made overnight, and gone to the flower market at Covent Garden, from which we returned laden with flowers, and I was then disposing them about our pretty living room. Mère Lucas surprised me by repeating a phrase which she had not used for a long time.

“Pauvre chérie, va!” said she in a trembling voice, regarding me with tender commiseration in her broad, motherly face as she stood before me with her hands planted on her massive hips.

“Why do you say that, Mère Lucas?” I



asked, for I could now speak in French with tolerable fluency ; “ I have everything I want.”

“ It is true, it is true. Thank Heaven you have everything you desire.”

“ Then why do you say poor dearie with that look of sadness ? ”

“ Why do I say it ? ” she said, echoing my words to get time for reflection. She hesitated ; her lips trembled as if she were about to tell something that prudence withheld ; and then taking me by the arms and drawing me to her breast she got out of the difficulty by saying, “ Because I love you, go,” and with a sounding kiss she released me and went off to her kitchen.

I accepted this feminine explanation then ; but before long the same expression cropped up again apropos of nothing when I was singing from sheer want of thought. That set me wondering. What was there in my condition that appealed to her sympathy ? I was no longer the deplorable creature that first excited her pity. I had corrected those faults of manner

which to her must have seemed as repulsive as the condition of a barbarian to an ordinary member of civilised society ; I had overcome the irrational and childish jealousy which had made me miserable whenever a friend came to visit Taras—*nearly* ; at any rate I could conceal the effect of any lingering feeling of that kind ; I could, and did, indulge my taste for pretty dress without restraint, and, to cap all, I had the constant companionship of the dearest and best friend that ever woman knew. Why then would a merry laugh now and then be checked by Mère Lucas with a sigh as she squeezed my hand, or end in a rueful shake of the head and a look of tearful sadness ?

Another phase of her affectionate regard added to my perplexity before long. She became remarkably urgent in her praise of George Gordon, and lost no opportunity of bringing us together.

“ Good-day. Fine weather, isn’t it, Madame Lucas ? ” Gordon would cry in his cheery voice

and execrable French when the door was opened to him. "Is Monsieur Taras in his studio?"

"I will go and see," Mère Lucas responded in good Norman, "but behold Ma'm'selle all alone;" and opening the sitting-room door she gave the poor man no option but to enter and pass a quarter of an hour with me, and a bad quarter of an hour it usually was for him owing to his very limited knowledge of French and my obstinate perseverance in speaking English only to Taras.

He was a nice fellow and the most intimate friend of Taras. A stronger bond of friendship existed between them than between Taras and Kavanagh, perhaps because there was more weakness in Gordon's character. Kavanagh was undoubtedly stronger in purpose and action, which was the reason, I believe, for Taras choosing him, rather than Gordon, as a guardian for me in case of accident.

I liked Gordon for his honest simplicity, his obvious kindness of heart, and for a certain

resemblance to Taras in personal appearance and some phases of character. Like Taras, he was strong and big, fair and blue-eyed, careless with regard to dress — in striking contrast to Kavanagh, who always dressed perfectly and had never a hair astray—and his voice was hearty and outspoken. They had both the same good laugh, the same honest, open way of looking you full in the eyes, the same gentleness and ready sympathy. Both might have been cast from the same mould; but Gordon was the rough cast, still needing the finishing touch and polish which gave Taras his immense superiority. Gordon's eyes lacked the artistic depth, and his expression the high intelligence and serious bent that distinguished Taras—just as his manner was wanting in some quality which marked the high breeding and refinement of his friend. In their hands more than anything the difference between them found expression. Gordon's were pretty, with tapering fingers and a dimple in the knuckle, soft and slow in movement. Taras had

long, thin fingers with spatula tips, and were full of nervous energy.

“ Ah, what a husband he would make, that good Monsieur Gordon ! ” Mère Lucas more than once exclaimed. “ So rich, so amiable, so gay, and with such a good heart—and so easy to lead ! ”

But it never occurred to me that I should lead him to the altar. No idea of marriage ever entered my head at that time ; indeed, when Mère Lucas concluded her praises of Gordon by declaring that he was “ *bon comme du pain*, ” as she invariably did, I felt disposed to remind her that happily I was not starving for want of bread just at present, and could get along very well without it for a time. Still I liked him, and chiefly for a reason that proved the truth of Taras’s observation : he was a friend that one could laugh at sometimes. His boyish awkwardness was on a par with his clumsy French. One could not treat him seriously, and he was as ready as I to burst into hearty laughter over his

blundering attempts to be graceful in my company. And his cheeriness was tempered by a certain delicacy of consideration and thoughtfulness which redeemed his character from boorishness. He generally had a box of bonbons in his pocket, or a French book, or some other trifle which he had picked up, thinking I might like it.

Seeing that I failed to profit by her hints and that I was as far as ever from regarding Gordon as a possible husband, Mère Lucas took more decisive means of warning me against the danger which lay unseen beneath my ever-increasing attachment to Taras. She found me one morning alone in his workshop setting some fresh flowers in the brown jar by the window.

“It is good to put flowers where he may see them when he turns from his work,” said she. “For his heart must be heavy when he thinks and thinks, hour after hour, of his country’s misery. How grand it is!” she

added, turning to the life-size group, now nearly finished, which Taras had modelled in the past month from the smaller sketch. "How it strikes one with pity and stirs up one's heart! One would say that poor beaten creature had no hope in the world. It is magnificent. And to think that out of a piece of soft, shapeless clay he makes a figure which fills one with sympathy for that poor Russia! It is grand to have that power and the courage to practise it. But the gift was not meant for him. It should have been given to one with no wish to live, no love for home and friends; not to my dear master. How fond he is of the world, of simple things, of us, look you. See how sweet he is with children, and think what happiness it would have been to such a man to have a dear wife and children of his own to love."

The idea of Taras with a wife presenting itself to my selfish mind for the first time filled me with jealous terror.

“Why should he not marry?” I asked, giving expression to my fear.

“Because he ought not to marry. That is reason enough for him. His choice is made. He has offered to sacrifice his life for his country, and with that fate hanging over him he will never marry. Believe me, my poor little friend, for I know my master; and I tell you that he will never marry—never, never!”



## CHAPTER XV.

### AWAKING.

I UNDERSTOOD now the meaning of Mère Lucas's ominous headshakings, of her endeavour to promote an attachment between me and Gordon, and of this last measure by which she had shown me that Taras would never marry: she feared that my affection for him was ripening into love, and that I should expect him to make me his wife.

The revelation quite stupefied me, and I sank down silently on the stool by his bench, with tears that I could not account for gathering in my eyes, and a feeling of desolation and loss in my heart.

Mère Lucas kissed me, and went away with

a little sob of sympathy. "He will never marry me," I said to myself, trying to realise my situation and find an explanation of the sadness that oppressed me.

The possibility of his marrying me had never entered my imagination. It might have occurred at once to an ordinary girl, placed, as I was, in close relation with him: most girls, I find, speculate on their chances of marriage from the day they first put on long frocks. But my life had been too hopeless and wretched for such prospects to come within my range of vision. The word "love" had never been breathed in my ear at Shadwell, and since then the friendship of Taras had satisfied every desire of my heart; and the more I knew of him, the more I knew of my own shortcomings and faults, the less open my mind had become to such a conjecture; so that now the idea of this man—a prince, the noblest being in the whole world—marrying me, a nameless waif, seemed wholly preposterous. Nevertheless, the suggestion, absurd as it was,

by a rapid reaction on my mind sent the hot blood tingling through my veins, and dazed my imagination with an intoxicating sense of joy.

“How bright and well you look this morning,” said Taras when we met.

I felt the colour in my cheeks, the brightness in my eyes, and I was glad to think that my appearance pleased him, but I could not look him in the face calmly. I was timid and unusually awkward that morning, so embarrassed and self-conscious that I could find nothing to talk about, and stammered in my stupid replies to his observations. But I was happy.

I spent an hour at my toilette before lunch, and in the afternoon went as far as Oxford Street before I found anything in frilling for my dress to satisfy my exacting requirements.

After dinner Taras took me to a concert at St. James's Hall. No music ever seemed so divinely beautiful, yet all the time I was thinking more of him than the performance; indeed, the sounds that fell on my ear served only as a

harmonious accompaniment to the sweeter strain of love that rose from my own heart. And all the time I was hoping that his hand, if only by accident, might touch mine as it lay on the arm of the stall that divided us.

He gave me his arm when we walked home in the starlight, and I trembled with delight; but it was no more than he always did when he thought I might feel tired. A pipe was in his mouth when he bade me "Good-night," and his cheerful "Sleep well" and his genial smile were as untinged with emotion as if he had been parting with a friend of his own sex—a comrade, an old "chum."

Undoubtedly love, unknown to me, had been smouldering in my breast from the first moment that Taras smiled at me, and to burst up into flame it only needed that unfortunate touch by which good old Mère Lucas attempted to stifle it. But her good intentions were not altogether mischievous in their effects.

"He will not marry me," I said, repeating

her words with a little addition of my own as I sat ruminating on the side of my bed. Then slowly, as my excitement abated, the graver import of her warning dawned upon me. His reason for avoiding marriage was not because he could not love, but because he would not doom his wife to widowhood or exile in Siberia—because he knew that ere long he must die or be taken prisoner to Russia.

At this perception a cold sweat burst out upon my brow, as if I had become aware for the first time of this impending fate ; but never had the idea of losing him impressed me with such terrible force. I pictured life without him. The still silence of the room suggested what the house would be when his voice was no longer heard, when no laughter pealed from the room below, no song heralded his coming from the workshop, no cheerful greeting welcomed me in the morning, no pleasant gossip enlivened the meal ; when the pipes might lie dusty and unused in the rack beside the chimney, and the

tools lie idle in the workshop where he had stood in earnest thought before his work.

I started, quaking with horror, to my feet, as I found him in imagination lying dead at the foot of the stairs when I went down, like the man I had seen drawn from the river once—with mouth agape and glazed, staring eyes, his fingers crooked in the last struggling clutch for life. I banished that repulsive vision only to see him lying with the sweet calm of sleep upon his face—a calm that would never give place to the play of lively mirth or melt in tender sympathy, cry as we might over that dear body.

With these terrors harrowing my soul, I could scarcely endure the suspense while I waited for his footfall on the stairs. At length, with a sigh of fervent gratitude, I heard him pass my door and go to his room. At least, he was safe for one night more! Yet later on, not satisfied with this, and led by womanly instinct rather than by reason, I stole noiselessly up to the landing above to assure myself, by the sound

of his breathing, that he was safe, and then I went below with a light through all the rooms, with the positive hope that I might find lurking there the villain sent to destroy him.

Going back to my room, I took myself to task for my want of vigilance. What had I done to guard his life since the night when I learnt that it was in danger? Nothing, beyond carrying weapons in my pocket for a few weeks, and listening when I found the chance to scraps of conversation that I could not understand; and even these feeble attempts had been abandoned lately, and I had suffered myself to be lulled into a state of carelessness by the absence of any open sign of hostility towards Taras and by his own disregard of precaution.

But this apathy on the part of the secret enemy I had been led to expect from the conversation of Taras and his friend Kavanagh. They had said that probably no further attempt would be made for some months. Those months were now passed. The critical time was at hand.

For I had gathered from one or two remarks that any fresh offence to the Czar would be the signal for a renewed and final effort to silence Taras. That fresh offence was about to be committed. The group of statuary was finished; the work of casting and burning done, the striking allegory would be publicly exhibited for all the world to talk of.

I recalled now, almost with stupefaction at my incredible indifference, an incident which proved that the secret enemy was on the alert and fully acquainted with Taras's design. The proprietor of the pottery at which it was intended to burn the clay group had called to inquire if the subject was of a political character. Taras, of course, admitted frankly that it was, and when Mr. H——, for commercial reasons, had begged to decline to give any assistance in the production, he asked Mr. H—— what reason he had for suspecting that the work was a political one.

“My information, sir,” said Mr. H——, “came in the form of an anonymous letter,



and for that reason I felt that, in justice to you, I ought to have a personal verification of the fact before declining the commission."

When Gordon heard of this he laughed, and declared that there was not a word of truth in the statement.

"No anonymous letter was needed. Old H— has found out that you are Borgensky, the Nihilist, and, with the hope of knighthood before him, and the dread of losing a sale or two in Russia, he thinks it best to decline the job."

At the time that explanation was accepted by me as readily as it was by Taras, but it was different with me now. I felt sure that the secret enemy had made this communication.

Who could he be? Clearly someone who had seen the group, and, not less obviously, one of the Russian visitors who had called on Taras. But which of them? To my eyes they seemed all pretty much alike—meek, gloomy, unhappy-looking men, dreadfully out at elbow; and the

shrug of pity or frown of discontent with which Mère Lucas expressed her feeling regarding them was usually accompanied with a significant movement of the thumb and finger, which led me to understand that their object was to get money out of Taras. There was none who looked like a traitor, and I could not believe that any would be base enough to betray him to the police; for, however unhappy they looked on arriving, not one went away with disappointment in his face, and though Taras was careful to conceal his generosity, I had reason to know that he gave away to his distressed countrymen infinitely more than he spent upon himself.

All through the night I taxed my brain with conjectures and surmises without arriving at any definite conclusion with regard to the identity of this dreaded enemy; and all I could do to silence my self-reproach for past neglect was to vow that I would be more watchful and vigilant in the future.

And this vow was not made in vain.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CZAR STRIKES.

WHILE we were at breakfast the next morning, a well-known knock at the door was followed by the usual cheery formula—

“ Good - morning, Madame Lucas. Fine weather, isn't it? Is Monsieur Taras in his studio ? ”

“ What can have brought out our friend so early ? ” exclaimed Taras, as Mère Lucas admitted the visitor. “ Welcome, George Gordon.”

Gordon's broad forehead was beaded with perspiration.

“ I was anxious to catch you before you went out, old man,” he exclaimed, wiping his face with a large silk handkerchief, after paying

his devoirs to me in some choice scraps of French, and laying an uncut illustrated magazine by my cup. "Couldn't get a cab, and—phew! the sun's blazing."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope, to make you expose yourself in this way?"

"Not a bit of it. But you'll never guess what has drawn me out of my den at this hour."

"I won't try. Never saw you out before midday before. What is it?"

"Business."

"Business — you, George Gordon — impossible!"

"It's a fact. I'll tell you all about it when we get up into the studio."

"No; tell me now. It's never too early to hear good news."

"Well, then—pardon me, mademoiselle, I can't express myself in French—have you found any one to burn your group yet a while?"

"No; I have been to Cramps and Fisher

and Hudson. No good. They're all frightened by the size ; they haven't proper kilns for the work, and can't do it—"

"Then I will."

"You !"

"Yes ; I've invested capital in a pottery."

"In order to help me out of my difficulty."

"Not entirely. The fact is, a kind of moral awakening is at the bottom of it. Don't laugh. It's no joke, I can tell you. I never felt so serious, so right down in earnest, in all my life. You know my conscience has been pricking me for some time past—— There you go again ! Can't a man have a conscience without being a red-hot revolutionist like you ? I tell you I have felt that my life has been misspent, that instead of lounging about doing nothing, except waste my money, I ought to occupy myself, and invest my capital in some industry that would give employment to the labouring class."

Gordon spoke with perfect gravity, but I saw by the twitching of Taras's moustache, as

he bent over his tea, that he found it difficult to listen to this announcement with a serious face.

“Now, old Bell—you know Colonel Bell, the fine old fellow who came with me about a month ago to look at your work—his feelings are just like mine, only—poor old fellow!—he hasn’t got the cash. He’s perhaps less concerned about the welfare of the labouring class than I am—it’s you who have worked me up so tremendously in that way—but he’s quite as eager to invest his capital in a paying concern. But the worst of it is, you know, he’s got so deuced little of it that he couldn’t very easily do anything off his own bat. And, for the sake of his daughter, he dare not venture it in a very risky concern. You know he has a daughter?”

Taras nodded, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, and a kindly smile.

“Kavanagh tells me she is a most beautiful and charming young lady,” he said.

“She is, old man,” Gordon said enthusiastically, colouring up to his temples. “You

must meet her. I've told her about Mademoiselle Aura, and she is most anxious to make her acquaintance."

"Doubtless," Taras's nod seemed to say.

"She is awfully nice. However, that has nothing to do with the affair. The thing is that the old gentleman and I have hit it off completely. He quite jumped at the proposal. Of course I take all risks."

Taras nodded as if this arrangement were the most natural thing in the world between men of business, and asked when the idea had first struck Gordon.

"The very day that humbug H—— backed out of the affair, and you expressed an opinion that it would be difficult to find another pottery where such a work could be fired. By the luckiest chance possible I learnt the same day that Perry, round the corner, wanted to sell his works."

"The gingerbeer bottle place?" Taras asked with a little ruefulness in his face.

“ Oh, he does drain pipes as well. But of course we shall build a new kiln—can’t make bricks without straw, you know—and get the best workmen that are to be had. I haven’t said a word on this matter to any one, for fear the negotiations might fall through; but last night the affair was concluded satisfactorily, and we enter into possession at once. As soon as you are ready the workmen can set about casting the group, so that it will be dry and ready for burning by the time the kiln is finished—of course, old man, supposing that you are willing to give us the job.”

“ A proper kiln and good workmen, I ask for nothing more than that.”

“ You may depend on having them. Anything is to be had for money, and I shall be only too glad to put mine to such good use. You know how thoroughly I sympathise with your cause. That alone would command my fortune; but look what a start this job will give us—what an advertisement!”



Taras stretched out his hand and grasped his friend's in a silence more expressive than any verbal testimony of his faith in Gordon, and recognition of the generous motive that underlay this scheme.

We saw a great deal of Gordon during the following week. On the Saturday there was a long consultation in the workshop with two of the cleverest men in the trade in regard to the casting of the group, which had now received the last touch, and it was agreed that on the Monday following the operation should be begun. Taras told me this when the workmen were gone and I found him in the workshop. There he stood before his work with folded arms, and after regarding it in silence for a few minutes he said, with impressive force—

“This is the finest work I have ever done in my life, Aura. I am proud of it.”

It was the pride of conscious strength, not the vanity of a weak mind, that impelled him to say this, and it evoked a corresponding feeling

of exultant admiration in my breast that banished all foolish thoughts and compunctions. I slipped my hand under his arm and pressed it. I was proud, too—not of the work, but of the man whose genius had produced it.

“It should be his finest work,” I said to myself, as the awful reflection flashed upon me that it was likely to be his last, and that it would cost him his life.

We went to Kew on Sunday afternoon, and lingered under the beautiful trees in the gardens until the keeper cried “All out!” We were both more silent than usual, for we were both thinking about the group—he with some anxiety, probably, about the delicate operation of the morrow, I for the result of its successful achievement. But with my anxiety was mingled a supreme happiness, a fitting sense of my privilege in being the friend and companion of such a noble man.

On Monday morning I rose early, and going out to the atelier, I saw Taras standing in the

doorway, his chin sunk upon his breast and his eyes fixed on something within.

At the sound of my step he raised his head and turned, looking down at me with deep dejection in his face, and with such vacancy in his regard that I could scarcely believe he saw me.

“Taras !” I exclaimed, halting at the foot of the steps in wonder and fear.

Without a word he beckoned me to come up, and as I reached his side on the landing he raised his hand and pointed within.

With a choking cry of dismay I perceived that his work—the beautiful group on which he had spent months of patient labour and strenuous thought—lay a shapeless wreck upon the floor. The irons that supported the subject stood there—a grotesque skeleton of the living figures, but the modelled clay was heaped upon the floor in a shapeless mass, the original design beaten out of recognition.

For the moment I thought that, finding it

fallen and his work spoilt, he himself had trampled upon it in a fit of frenzied exasperation.

“Was it too damp?” I asked, knowing the care he took to wring out the wetted cloths that enveloped the group at night time.

He shook his head.

“Then who has done this?” I asked.

“The Czar,” he replied. “His arm is long.”

“But not so long as yours,” said I, fired with a spirit of revengeful wrath. “You will not give in because of this. You will fight him to the end. What you have done before you can do again. You can build up the figures once more and make them as beautiful as they were. It is only a matter of time.”

“My brave Aura!” said he, laying his hand affectionately on my shoulder, “you give me the courage I lack. Yes, that is the way to face a disaster like this. Take up the sword and fight

on—that alone makes defeat honourable. What does it matter the delay of a few months? We shouldn't be content to do nothing. They've left me the bones, at any rate," he added with a laugh and a nod at the rusted iron, and we shall soon see the flesh grow again on them. Let us go down now; after breakfast we will begin again. It's good to have a brave friend at such a time as this. Come, Aura."

But, for all my bravery, I could eat no breakfast, and when Taras spoke of our visit to Kew I burst into a flood of uncontrollable tears, with a recollection of the confident hope and pride which had filled us with such happiness and content.

When Gordon and the workmen came I let them go up to the workshop without a word, but I determined to spare Taras the pain of telling the story again, and so when Kavanagh came I stopped him in the passage, and taking him into the sitting-room, myself

related what had happened. He listened with astonishment and seemed greatly shocked.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed, “what a terrible blow for poor Taras! Gordon told me that they were to begin casting the group to-day. I came to congratulate my friend on having finished his work. Poor fellow! What is he going to do?”

“Make another group,” I answered fiercely, “and if that’s destroyed, another after that. You don’t think he’s going to give up, do you?”

He paused in reflective silence for a minute; then went to the door and looked into the passage. He stood there for another minute, closed the door as silently as he had opened it, and, returning to my side, continued—

“No,” he said quietly; “that wasn’t, however, exactly what I meant. Can you tell me if he has taken any steps to discover the person who committed the outrage?”

“He hasn’t taken any steps. He knows who

did it. It was the Czar ; he says so. There's no getting at him."

"But we ought to get at the men employed by him. For what is to prevent them from doing this again when the next model is finished if they are allowed to escape now ? "

"Well, how are they to be caught ? "

"That is what we who are the friends of Taras ought to try and find out. Taras is too intent on striking at the Czar to occupy himself with the agents ; but we have not that excuse for indifference, and we might, at least, attempt to find them. That, at any rate, is my feeling, and I think it is yours too."

"Of course it is. I can't sleep at night for fearing what they may do."

"Then let us make a practical beginning now. We need not bother Taras about it. Let us try to find the enemy out just as if he were an ordinary thief who had broken into the house. Do you agree to that ? "

“Why, certainly.”

“Tell me now,” said he, drawing his chair a little nearer, and lowering his voice, “when did this take place?”

“I don’t know. We found it all smashed down when we went up in the workshop before breakfast this morning. It was all right when we were there on Saturday night.”

“You did not go in there yesterday?”

“No.”

“Then it must have happened between Saturday night and this morning. Now,” dropping his voice almost to a whisper, “what time does Mère Lucas go to bed?”

The question startled me, but I answered that she was never up later than nine.

“Taras sleeps at the top of the house, doesn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“And Mère Lucas on the same floor as your room—the first floor.”

“Yes.”



“Tell me. Does she ever go downstairs after you go to your room?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Do you ever hear any peculiar noise in the night?”

“No,” I replied, with an uncomfortable creeping of the flesh.

Kavanagh reflected for a minute or two, stroking the short black beard that covered his handsome face, his sleepy eyes so closed that only narrow slits of light were reflected under the long curved lashes; and then again bending forward he murmured in a tone perfectly inaudible beyond ourselves—

“Were you at home all day yesterday?”

“No; we went to Kew in the afternoon, and came home latish.”

“Ah! you left the house in the care of Mère Lucas?”

“Yes.”

“Was she at home when you returned?”

“No; she came in about ten minutes later.”

He nodded, as if he had expected this.

“Did she say where she had been?” he asked.

“She went to see a friend in Soho, I think she said.”

“Have you ever seen a friend call upon her here?”

“No.”

He shook his head, smiling again, as if he had expected my reply.

“Of course,” he said, “you found no locks broken or anything of that kind?”

“No.”

“Well, that is all I have to ask you for the present, I think. But I need not tell you how important it is that no one should know of this conversation, least of all Mère Lucas.”

“Why, you don’t suspect she did it, do you?” I whispered.

“No,” he replied, drawing the word out doubtfully; “but I feel tolerably certain on one point: there is very little doubt that if you had

gone into the studio before Mère Lucas returned, you would have found the mischief done. Whether she is more closely concerned in this abominable affair I shall be able to tell you when I have found out more about that mysterious friend in Soho. And I think I shall be able to tell you something about *him* before long. Now, my dear mademoiselle," he added, rising, "let me warn you again not to let Mère Lucas imagine you suspect her. Try to be just the same as usual with her; only keep your eyes open, and your ears also, *especially at night!*"

With this mysterious injunction he left me.

"Is it possible that Mère Lucas is the enemy?" I asked myself, as I sat alone, shivering with nervous apprehension.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### MISGIVINGS.

I WAS still weighing Kavanagh's mysterious questions and dark insinuations, unable to draw any definite conclusion from the conflicting doubts that agitated my mind, when the door opened and Mère Lucas came in, her big mouth puckered up with pain, and tears running down her cheeks.

“What a disaster! what a terrible calamity, my poor dear friend!” she exclaimed, dropping on a chair as if overcome with grief; and then rocking herself backwards and forwards, she whimpered out her grief in a long chain of incoherent phrases, broken by sobs, behind the blue apron which she held to her eyes.

It seemed to me, as I watched her, impossible that such grief could be simulated, that anyone could summon such a flow of tears from an unfeeling heart. But then, I reflected, the person chosen by the Czar's agent to execute so dangerous a mission must of necessity be extremely subtle and deceptive.

"The beautiful figures all torn down—the whole work ruined!" she went on. "The work it has taken so long to make; the pride and joy of my dear master! I would rather the monsters had beaten me down and crushed the life out of me!"

I asked myself if Mère Lucas was not overdoing it now.

"And to say," she added, getting the better of her tears, and dropping her apron, "to say that I am the cause of it all!"

"Does he say so?" I asked quickly.

"Ah! I would he had. Look you, my poor dear friend, it is easier to bear blame when one

deserves it, than forgiveness and words of kindness."

She burst into tears again as she repeated the words with which Taras had tried to comfort her.

My judgment wavered—it was difficult to doubt the sincerity of her emotion.

"It is my fault; I say it, I!" she cried, striking her breast, adding, with dramatic emphasis, "and it is true! What right had I to leave the house when my master was away? What am I here for but to protect the house and my master's interests? If it had happened while I was at home, it would have been a great misfortune, but, at least, I should not have been culpable; no one could have said I suffered the mischief to be done."

"Does anyone say so now?" I asked.

"Why, it is evident, my poor friend. Any good-for-nothing, watching his opportunity, might have opened the front door with a bent nail and walked in. And, animal that I am, I

did not even look round the place when I came in to see that all was safe as I left it."

Kavanagh's suggestive questions returned forcibly to my mind, and I found it was quite conceivable that a crafty person should accuse herself of a pardonable fault to screen herself from the suspicion of an act of baseness.

"And to think that this is my fault, and that I owe everything in the world to that dear master. One would say that I did it expressly to show that there was no more gratitude in the world ;" and the tears starting from her eyes again, she rose and went out of the room whimpering, "Heaven ! I deserve to be turned out of doors, and then what would become of me."

I started, thinking that I had a key to the mystery in that phrase. Had not the dread of being cast adrift induced Mère Lucas to connive at the destruction of the group? If she had been warned of the fatal consequences to Taras which the production of this work must entail, would she not, for his sake as well as her own,

agree to this simple measure for averting such a terrible result? Gauging her disposition by my own, I believed she would; and my heart readily forgave her offence. But, though affection for the old woman inclined me to accept this explanation, I resolved to watch her closely till I had seen Kavanagh and heard the result of his inquiry respecting the friend in Soho.

I followed her when she went out shopping; I slept with my door open and, waking at a fancied sound, crept out in the darkness to listen on the stairs. I discovered nothing tending in the slightest degree to confirm the suspicion of her complicity in the outrage; on the contrary, her continued dejection, which the cheerful remonstrance of Taras failed to remove, seemed to confirm the sincerity of her sorrow and humiliation.

Apparently Kavanagh found greater difficulty than he had anticipated in his investigations, for a week elapsed before I saw him again. When he went up with Taras into the workshop to see



the new group, which was already taking form, I followed, with the hope of finding an opportunity of hearing the communication which I thought he might have to make to me.

“I shall finish it now,” said Taras confidently, “by the time Gordon’s kiln is ready to be fired.”

“If nothing happens to you or it in the meantime,” said Kavanagh sombrely.

“It isn’t likely the rascals will try that game on again. If they do, so much the worse for them. They will have to settle accounts with poor old Mère Lucas.”

“And supposing, nevertheless,” said Kavanagh, with a glance at me as he turned to Taras, “that this group shared the fate of the last, what then?”

“What then? Why, I would begin another with a revolver by my side, and never leave it till I gave it to the world to protect.”

Kavanagh nodded gravely, but made no other comment. For some minutes he stood

silently watching Taras as he built up a fold in the drapery with pellets of moist clay; then, recovering from his fit of abstraction, he looked at his watch and pleaded an engagement. Taras laid aside his clay, and, despite his friend's remonstrances, led the way down the steps to see him to the door.

In that moment, Kavanagh, turning to me, murmured—

“ I have something to tell you when I get the chance. But, for Heaven's sake, don't lose sight of Mère Lucas! ” Then he added some commonplace in a louder tone and ran down the steps.

At dinner time Taras said to me—

“ I am going to smoke a pipe with Gordon presently; will you walk as far as the Adelphi with me? ”

Nothing would have pleased me more, but with Kavanagh's warning still ringing in my ears I dared not accept the offer.

“ How long shall you stay with him? ” I

asked, thinking that if the time were not too long Mère Lucas might be left.

“A couple of hours or so: too long for you to wait. And I can’t very well ask you to go up into his rooms.”

“I know that.” I had almost ceased to be exacting, and no longer begrudged Taras the liberty which a man always wishes to feel. “Thank you very much, but I think I would rather stay at home to-night.”

It was eight o’clock when Taras started. At nine Mère Lucas came in to bid me a lugubrious adieu, and then I began to listen to the footsteps in the street, though I had no reason to expect Taras in for at least another hour. At ten o’clock I went out as noiselessly as I could and looked up at Mère Lucas’s window. There was no light in the room, but as I reached the door of the workshop the window sash was thrown up, and her head, in its white nightcap, appeared; she had heard me unbolt the back door.

“Who is there?” she cried in a tone of alarm.

I told her it was I, who had come out to see if the lock which had been put on the workshop door was secure.

“My poor little friend,” said she; “do you think I could lie down if I had not made sure of that? Is it that my good little master has not returned yet?”

I told her that I expected him in every minute, and with a mutual “Good-night,” she closed the window, and I entered the house.

I had left a light in the kitchen. Looking round, I saw that everything was in its place, and the bright latchkey of the front door, which Mère Lucas used when she went out in the daytime, hanging over the dresser.

“Surely,” I said to myself, reassured by these signs, “Kavanagh has been deceived. There is no necessity to watch Mère Lucas to-night.”

I returned to the front room to listen again

for Taras's footstep. At rare intervals my ear caught an approaching sound, and my heart rose with hopeful anticipation to sink lower than ever when the step became sufficiently audible for me to distinguish that it was not my friend's. As the minutes dragged on my anxiety increased. It occurred to me that Kavanagh's hint referred to some personal attack which he had reason to believe would be made upon Taras in the house that night, an attack which Mère Lucas was to facilitate by admitting her accomplices when he slept. It might have been agreed that, in the event of his going out, the attack should be postponed, in view of the uncertainty with regard to the hour of his return. That would account for Mère Lucas's present inactive attitude.

After waiting a little while, another supposition suggested itself. What if the scene of attack had simply been shifted by Taras going out. I had heard rumours of persons being robbed on the Embankment and thrown

into the river. Taras had an infatuation for the Embankment, which might be known to his watchful enemies. They might waylay him at some point between Westminster Bridge and Lambeth, and "silence" him in that expeditious way. \*

At that moment Big Ben chimed the three quarters past ten. I strained my ears to catch some other sound, but none breaking the intense silence, I resolved to end my intolerable suspense by going out to find Taras.

I slipped off my shoes and ran silently upstairs. From my room I took a small hat and a dark blue ulster, shut the door, and, having assured myself by the sound of Mère Lucas's peaceful breathing that there was certainly no danger in leaving her, I descended to the living room, and in a couple of minutes completed my preparation.

Not a soul was in sight when I looked out. With the key I had taken from the kitchen I closed the door carefully, and then sped off on my

strange mission. The Albert Embankment was deserted, but for a poor wretch asleep under the wall of the hospital. It struck eleven as I crossed Westminster Bridge. Keeping the north side, I hastened along the Victoria Embankment, eagerly scanning every figure that came within my range of vision, turned up Villiers Street, and thence on to the Adelphi Terrace. A brougham stood before an open door; the driver was doing something to the horse's bit. No one else was to be seen on the Terrace. I saw him stop to look at me, but as I drew nearer he turned his face and busied himself again with the harness. On the fanlight of the door was written "Grandison Chambers;" it was there that Gordon had his rooms. I stopped, asking myself what I should do now.

The brisk walk had dissipated that part of my anxiety which was due to morbid imagination; the peaceful calm of the Embankment, the bustle in Villiers Street of people thronging from the theatres to the railway station, had

discredited the fear of open violence being done at such an hour, and the suspicion dawned upon my mind that I was acting foolishly. Was there anything to justify alarm in Taras being an hour or so later in his return than he had anticipated? It was no more than my knowledge of his amiable disposition to yield to the persuasion of a friend might have led me to expect, and would at another time. How absurd I should look if I went up into Gordon's rooms and found Taras there quietly smoking. What excuse could I make?

The fear of making myself ridiculous to Taras was great, but the fear of making him ridiculous to Gordon was greater still. It might be said that he needed my protection—someone to take him home safely if he stayed out beyond a certain hour. I did not want Taras even to imagine that I was anxious on his account. It might lead him, from consideration for me, to stay at home when otherwise he would go out. This might involve an irksome feeling



tending to restrict his freedom. Not for the world would I be the cause of that.

But if he were not up there with Gordon? Ought I to go away before I had ascertained whether he was safe—could I rest in this state of uncertainty? It was on my mind to ask the driver of the brougham if he had seen anyone leave the house, when he cast his eyes round and gave me another furtive look.

He was a peculiar-looking man, gaunt and ungainly, with deep-sunk eyes and hollow cheeks, and the sidelong glance under his beetling brows was so suspicious-looking and uncanny that in my nervous, hesitating mood I could not summon resolution to question him. I walked towards the end of the Terrace to settle what course I should take, but before I had gone a dozen yards from the door I turned round, impatient of my indecision, with the resolve to speak to the man. Someone had just come from the open door, and stood now looking down the Terrace in the

opposite direction. He turned his head sharply and looked towards me.

It was not Taras. I saw that at the first glance, but the next instant I perceived that it was Kavanagh. I knew him by his slight, erect, military-looking figure, his close-fitting coat, and the correct hat drawn low over his brows. He must have seen me, and might have recognised me, for I stood under the light of a lamp; but, as if from indifference or polite discretion, he took no further notice of me, but sauntered to the driver of the brougham, spoke a few words to him, inaudible to me at that distance, and then sauntered back into the house.

His presence reassured me, and I was glad that I had neither gone up to Gordon's rooms nor spoken to the driver. Obviously he had dropped in and prolonged the visit of Taras. Nevertheless, I could not make up my mind to go back to Lambeth yet. I turned again and walked on to the end of the Terrace, where the

railings at the corner of Adam Street screened me, and there I waited.

Very soon afterwards, Taras came out with Gordon and Kavanagh. They stood chatting for a few minutes; then they shook hands; Kavanagh stepped into the brougham, and Gordon strolled off with Taras in the direction of Villiers Street.

The brougham passed me at the corner of Adam Street, and the driver cast another furtive glance at me, but Kavanagh was occupied in lighting a cigarette.

END OF VOL. I.

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Venerable

Sir H. C. ?

Vicar - M.C.

J C R S L M N P

Fluty - 842

Master - 842

Sir J. T. 842

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Vicar

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Sir H. C. ?

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